

2

Making Magic

The Sweet Life of a
Witch Who Knows an
Infinite MP Loophole

Aloha Zachou
illust. Tetubuta



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Chapter 0: The Witch's Library

Within the Witch of Creation's Forest, formerly known as the "Wasteland of Nothingness," I had a library built to house the books I'd collected for my hobby.

"Lady Wiiiitch, where should I take this book?"

"Hm? Oh, that's an adventure novel that was popular about a century ago. That brings me back. I was really into it at the time... Can you bring it over to the novel shelf?"

"Roger!"

The book Teto was holding was one in a twenty-four-volume-long series—a fictional account of the life of one adventurer four hundred years ago. Much regarding adventuring life and the limits of magical tools had changed between then and now; the author had gathered historical, cultural, and ethnographic data from primary sources among the long-lived races. You could call it a masterpiece with historical context like that.

"Now where should I take *this* one, Lady Witch?"

"That's the paperback edition of that last book. I think I just bought it a while ago. They edited some of the presentations and descriptions in it since the first edition, so put it over in the novel corner. Then I can go through and check them against each other."

Despite it being an adventure novel from a hundred years ago, even now it was getting new paperback editions and illustrations, changing in form to be read the world over.

I watched Teto as she energetically lugged around the books I'd bought for a little community early childhood literacy project of mine. Next up was my head maid, Beretta, approaching me with some older books to ask what to do with them.

"Mistress, what shall we do with these?"

"This one is...handwritten, huh. On parchment too. The contents are someone's journaling about their life back then and their sales ledger."

It was five hundred years old, at the very least. It was already moth eaten, stained, and creased from the bad conditions it was once kept in, but I'd cast some preservation magic on it when I bought it for myself.

"Should we destroy it, then?"

"Nope. It can be used as a cultural reference for the period it

originates from, so let's keep it in the reference room in the annex."

There weren't many people who could read and write five hundred years back, much less keep a journal. The autobiographical content alone was a cultural treasure; plus, the goods and commodity prices written in the ledger would be an indispensable tool for comparative study of past living conditions.

The books I'd collected in that vein were preserved in the Witch of Creation's Forest's library as historical records, widely available to the residents. The forbidden texts, like spell books too dangerous to let out into the world, research materials from banned arts, or cursed tomes, I kept securely sealed inside my manor.

As we sorted through the books, Beretta's doll attendants had picked up several books and started poring through them where they stood.

"A-amazing... This is a work written by the elf novelist Vallora in their early days before I was born. And it's the first edition!"

"Th-This one is an art book from that famous printmaker Olein?! Wow, and it's not faded at all. The preservation magic's kept it in mint condition!"

"And here's an economics book that was banned in a country that fell 150 years ago because it criticized their government and finance system! Most of the books from that kingdom were lost along with it—this is insanely rare!"

"These are amazing too... Theses and academic journals from well-known magic researchers. Some of these tomes were so closely guarded by the factions that owned them that they'd never let them leave the premises! And some of these manuscripts are of some of the most famous grimoires put to paper!"

It was a veritable treasure trove, for those who knew their worth. The book-loving doll attendants all looked over to me, a reverent gleam in their eyes.

"Reading is fine, everyone, but do it after the job is done."

"P-Please excuse us, head maid!"

I smiled as Beretta chided the other doll attendants back to work, and continued on my own trips down memory lane with the books nearby. Then I came across two particular books and couldn't help but smile wryly.

"Mistress, why don't you take a break soon? ...Hm? What are those?" Beretta asked, looking at the books in my hands.

I showed them to her. They were simply bound, made of (then only recently introduced) plant paper, with holes punched in it and tied together with string. The titles were "Mixing Recipes" and "Papermaking Technique."

"These really take me back."

“They really do! Those are the first books you ever wrote, Lady Witch!”

“Mistress’s first books?” Beretta asked, head tilted in wonder.

Nowadays, I was referred to by the excessive title of “The Witch of Creation,” and I’d written many things, like magical theory texts, magic instruction books, technical books, and blueprints for magic tools, all to pass the time. And here were the very first books I’d written—by hand, on slightly substandard paper.

“Yes, it is. One is a collection of practical potion recipes I’d learned on our journeys, and the other on how to use some of those potions to make paper.”

“Back then, there was no transcription magic or magic printing tools, so Lady Witch and Teto had to copy them all by hand. How nostalgic...”

Teto and I murmured softly, caressing the imperfectly bleached, rough-textured paper as we thought back to those days. Back then, we’d traveled wherever we willed as adventurers, having yet to find the Wasteland of Nothingness where we’d later settle.

The story of a church’s orphanage we’d found on our journey. The story of us giving that garden-variety orphanage’s children a little bit of help.

Chapter 1: One Year After That

A Certain Rural Girl's Side

I was a girl who lived in a normal farming village; its one noteworthy feature was the ancient ruins nearby. Living with my parents, I helped out both with my father's farmwork and my mother's housework. I also acted as our village's herbalist.

And on that day, I'd taken all the local children with me to the nearby forest to gather the fruits of the land.

"Hey! Sissy Sayah! A nut!"

"Wow, great job finding it! You're so good!"

"Sissy, mushroom and fruit."

"Ahh, that mushroom'll make your tummy hurt if you eat it, so let's throw it away. But this fruit is okay."

My Harvesting skill should have been higher than theirs, but the children's lower line of sight made them better at finding edible plants closer to the ground. I checked each and every thing the kids harvested—mushrooms in particular, to weed out the edible from the poisonous. The wild plant harvesting tricks my mother taught me and the Knowledge of Poison skill I'd learned from everything my predecessor had told me about poisonous plants had prepared me well for the task. While the kids harvested food, I also gathered medicinal herbs to prepare for the winter season.

"Whew, it's getting a bit chilly, huh?"

With a smile, I watched the kids zealously gather mushrooms, unbothered by the cold. I, on the other hand, had to rub my hands together to warm them.

When I looked up at the treetops, the leaves were changing to red and yellow, and dropping down to the ground. The mushrooms you could gather this time of year were delicious and would probably be even better when made into a warm soup. Though the warm season was behind us, the hood my mother had made for me kept the worst of the chill off.

"Whew. We should get going soon, or it'll get dark!"

"Okaaay!"

We'd gathered enough fruits of the forest in our baskets, so I figured it was time to wrap up and head back to the village for safety's sake. As we set off, I realized I couldn't hear the usual chirping of wild birds or see any signs of wildlife.

Unable to hear the breath of life in the forest, yet hearing the trees stir without any wind, I felt an indescribable fear take hold of me.

“...This feels bad. Okay, everyone. Let’s hurry home!”

Wanting to get back ASAP, I led the children back towards the village. But then—

“GUUUOOOOOAAAAARRRRRGHHHHH!”

“Eeep! Sissy, I’m scared!”

A low roar issued from within the forest. The children clung to me, terrified by the sound.

“It’s okay! Just keep walking, right back home!”

I wanted to bolt home, but there was no way I could leave the little kids behind, so I walked slowly but surely towards the village.

Then...

Thump, thump. Heavy footsteps echoed from within the forest, and I heard a short, low howl from behind us.

“Everyone! Throw away your baskets and run as fast as you can!”

“But Sissy, the food!”

“Forget the food! Hurry!”

Realizing we didn’t have a second to lose, I had the children abandon the day’s haul and run.

The forest should have been safe, but the horrifying growling slowly followed us. If we were lucky and the source focused on what we’d harvested instead of us, we could probably outrun it. But it held its pace, and when I turned to look—I saw it.

“Eeek?! A monster!”

The thing chasing us from within the forest was a black-furred bear monster. It had two columns of eyes, totaling six, and was running full tilt at us on all fours, mowing down trees as it went.

My face froze in dread. But if we could just push a bit farther and make it to the edge of town, the hunters would save us.

“Ah!”

“Rina!”

One of the children tripped and fell on a tree root. All the other kids stopped to look back at them, only to see the six-eyed bear chase us down at a terrific pace and freeze.

I tried to help her up, but when I realized I couldn’t do it in time, I just hugged her, putting myself between her and the bear.

“Goddess...”

I whispered a small prayer, and a black shadow flew between me and the bear as it raised its sharp front claws towards me.

“*Multi-Barrier!*”

A dome of blue-white light formed around the children and me. The bear swiped its paw down, drooling as it put its all into trying to break it, but the wall of light didn’t even budge, and the black shadow

—a beautiful girl—lowered her black robe’s hood, gently speaking to us.

“Thank goodness I made it in time. Everything’s okay now. You did great, running like that.”

She was younger than me, but her voice comforted me the same way my mother’s used to, and I began to sob silently.

I was the oldest, so I had to protect my juniors. That was what I’d thought. But really, I was absolutely and utterly terrified. Those feelings overflowed, and my tears wouldn’t stop. Seeing me cry, the little girl in my arms started crying with me. I tried to stop my tears, but I couldn’t. The mage girl just gently rubbed my back as I choked in breaths.

“You’re okay now. Don’t worry... Teto, you take care of the rest!”

The girl’s tone changed from how she spoke to the children and I, resounding strongly through the forest. A second later, another girl appeared directly behind the bear monster as it tried to breach the wall of light.

“I’m on it! Haaaaah—KIIICK!”

A beautiful, tan-skinned girl appeared in a surge of action, landing a flying kick to the side of the bear monster’s face. The monster was sent flying off to the side, breaking down numerous trees as it went, before its landing flung the fallen leaves on the ground whirling into the air.

The scene seemed like such a joke that our tears stopped, and all we could do was stare in mute amazement.

Witch’s Side

After leaving the pioneer village, we had gone on a wandering journey, stopping to visit towns off of the highway. Quiet rural villages, remote yet wealthy villages, poor villages, villages of only humans, villages with no humans, rough villages—we went everywhere, acting like odd-jobbers. We’d defeat monsters as adventurers, sell the potions I made myself as mixologists, or act like merchants, peddling salt and ironware made with my Creation Magic.

Today we were on the road to a village with some structures from ancient times.

“Lady Witch! Ruins! I can’t wait!”

“They were discovered more than a hundred years ago; they’re more or less fully excavated by now, but it’d be wonderful if there was some treasure left for us.”

Though I nodded along as Teto chattered excitedly, internally, I wasn’t expecting to see treasure at all.

“Ruins” were the local catchall for structures completely covered

in protective magic that kept them standing for many, many years. Places like that sometimes had treasures left from the age of their inception, or abandoned items turned into magical tools by all the ambient mana.

But as excited we may have been about the ruins, we had to ask around in this village and make our preparations first.

“Hello, girls. Do you have some business in our village?” asked a near-elderly man from the village’s vigilante corps as we approached.

“I’m Chise, an adventurer and a witch. We’ve come to see the ruins nearby.”

“I’m Teto, also an adventurer!”

He raised an eyebrow in surprise. “Ruins? Those take me back. I heard they were excavated long before I was even born. I used to play in them as a kid, but there’s not much left there now.”

The man, though a bit nostalgic and shocked by our aim, tried to warn us off of it so we wouldn’t end up as another set of young adventurers whose treasure hunting ended in vain, but I corrected him.

“We’ve only come to study the ruins for future reference.”

“Anywhere is fun if I’m with Lady Witch!”

“You sound more like a scholar than an adventurer,” the man said with an amused laugh, volunteering himself as a guide. “We don’t have an inn here, but we’ve got an empty house. If you ask the mayor, he’ll probably let you stay there. You shouldn’t need a map; the villagers use the same route.”

“Thank you very much. We’re thinking we’ll go there tomorrow.”

“Thank you!”

As we walked on, looking out over the fields as autumn eased them into harvesting season, a young man came running from the other side of the village in a panic.

“Gramps, we got trouble!”

“What’s got you in such a tizzy?”

Even Teto and I got nervous, hearing that something was up.

“There’s an Arktus out in the forest!”

“What?! We’ve gotta get the village’s defenses up, quick!”

Arktoi were a type of bear monster, and they were ranked C on the slaying difficulty scale. What’s worse, around this time of year they actively hunted big targets—humans included—to build fat reserves for the winter.

“Another hunter saw it deep in the forest. But Sayah and the little ones are still out there, searching for mountain vegetables and medicinal herbs!”

“Ring the bell right now, and tell ’em to come on back! Fast!” The older man, who’d been playing up the nice old guy act up until then,

started shooting off orders promptly with a grave look on his face.

A second later— “GRRRRROOOOOOOOAAAAHHHHHHH!”

We all spun around as a roar echoed from within the forest.

“It’s already this close?! Sorry, girls. If you’re adventurers, can you help defend the village? Arktoi are too much for D- and E-rankers.”

The way he spoke implied that the village would beef up its defenses until adventurers who could take out the bear came.

“Of course we’ll help. But the children in the forest are more important. Plus, we’re—”

“Look at this!”

Teto and I both pulled out our guild cards to show the vigilante grandfather and his grandkid the *C-rank* written there in bright, friendly letters.

“You’re C-rank...?!”

“We’ve got no time to waste, so we’ll work on our own. Let’s go, Teto—Fly!”

“Roger!”

My flight spell took me almost clear of the tree line. I shot straight for the howl’s point of origin. Teto used Body Strengthening to run after me. The two men rushed to follow us, but they fell hopelessly behind. I passed over the group of villagers who’d gathered to protect the entrance nearest to the forest, while Teto leaped right over them.

“Wh-What was that?!”

“A human?! And a girl?!”

“What the hell’s happening here?! We’ve already got a monster on our hands!”

Ignoring the villagers’ voices, I flew into the forest. With my Mana Perception on, I saw about what I expected: people running in the opposite direction and a monster bearing down on them.

“Teto, I’ll go on ahead to protect the kids!”

“Got it!”

I picked up speed and met up with the children, jumping in between them and the Arktus just as it raised its foreleg to strike.

“*Multi-Barrier!*”

I put up a multilayered barrier to soak the bear’s attacks and calmed the children. The oldest girl in the group clung to me, still sobbing from the terror, and I gently rubbed her back to soothe her. While all of this was happening, the Arktus hammered away at the barrier, annoying me.

“...Teto, you take care of the rest!”

“I’m on it! Haaaaah—KIIICK!”

My tone was lower than I thought it would be as I left the bear to Teto, who caught it in the side with a flying spear kick. The Body Strengthened kick sent it flying, knocking down a few trees before it

came to a stop. Its neck was twisted in a way that it very much shouldn't have been, its tongue flopping out as it died instantly.

The kids stared in blatant shock. I kinda thought I heard the dull crackle of its neck breaking as the kick landed.

A year ago, Teto had fought ogres (also C-rank monsters) with her bare hands and won. She was even stronger nowadays; there was no way she'd fall behind monsters of the same rank.

"Lady Wiiiitch~! Can we make a yummy bear meat hot pot with this bear?"

"That'll come after we bring it back to the village and cut it up."

"Okaaay!"

And so, Teto took the dead Arktus she'd just killed by the arm and hauled it up on her shoulders, dragging it behind her. Smiling wryly at the sight of her carrying a two-meter-tall, four-hundred-plus-kilogram monster like it was nothing, I turned back to the kids.

"Okay, let's head back to the village. The adults were all worried about you guys."

As I tried my best to speak softly, a little girl who'd fallen and skinned her knee pulled at my robe.

"But the mushrooms we gathered..."

"Oh, Rina!"

The older girl scolded her, but it sounded like the child was concerned about the fruits of the land they'd thrown away while running. The little girl was shaking her head, tears in her eyes at the scary monster and the pain she felt from her skinned knee.

"I see. You've gotta bring them home, since you worked so hard gathering them. *Water, Heal.*"

Kneeling down, I brushed off the dirt she'd gotten on her clothes when she fell, then cleaned her skinned knee with water magic before healing it.

Eyes sparkling at the sight, the little girl gave me a big smile. "Thank you, big sissy!"

Getting a pure little girl's thanks was reward enough.

Chapter 2: You Need to Cut Your Monsters up Completely After You Kill Them

“I’m so sorry. You saved us, and now you’re helping us pick up all the mountain veggies we dropped...”

“It’s fine. It would be terrible if you didn’t get to enjoy the tastes of autumn after all.”

The girl, who was older than I was, apologized as she picked up the basket she’d thrown while running and gathered up the mountain veggies that were scattered about. Some of it was ruined, no thanks to the bear crushing it underfoot. Most of it was still fine, since the smell of the powerful monster was keeping other animals from moving in.

“Grr, I’m a bear~!”

“Aha ha ha!”

The children laughed as Teto moved the broken neck of the bear they’d been so afraid of around like a ventriloquist’s dummy on her shoulders. Ignoring the melancholy I felt from the bear’s six empty eyes, I helped pick up the mountain goodies.

The older girl spoke. “U-um, my name is Sayah.”

“I’m Chise the Witch. I’m an adventurer.”

“And I’m Teto, the swordswoman who protects Lady Witch! I’m an adventurer too!”

“Miss Chise and Miss Teto—”

“Just Chise is fine. I’m not anyone special, anyway.”

“Teto also dislikes stuffy talk.”

Sayah hesitated a little to ease off on the modest speech like we’d asked—it made sense, given that she was talking to (by my estimation) the most powerful mage she’d ever met and someone who could disintegrate a monster’s spinal column with a single kick. “But... Okay. Chise and Teto, then?”

We nodded with big smiles as she repeated our names without using “Miss.” As we walked back to the village, she asked us some questions.

“Why did the two of you save us? And why did you come to a village like ours, anyway?”

“We came to see the ruins nearby.”

“We’ve wanted to check them out since we first heard of them!”

I smiled bitterly as the girl looked surprised at what we said. To a local, it was probably nothing more than a playground for children.

“And just as we arrived, we heard that this bear monster had appeared while all the children were out in the forest, so we ran to help.”

As I murmured about how glad I was that we made it in time, Sayah quietly looked downwards.

“I see... Thank you so much.”

“I’ll accept your thanks, but you also need to thank the young vigilante corps man who came running to warn everyone. If he hadn’t told us, we might not have gotten here in time.”

“Okay, I will.” Her face tensed up a bit, probably having remembered the fear she felt being chased by that monster, but it seemed she knew who she should be thanking.

And so the eldest girl, Sayah, and I wordlessly approached the village, listening to the giggles of the children as they watched Teto drag the Arktus’s corpse along. It took us a good while, since we were walking slow to keep pace with the children, but we were able to get back to the village safely.

“Hey! The kids are back!”

“And there’s a girl carrying the Arktus on her back?! And it’s *dead!*”

The men were all in front of the entrance to the forest, geared up for when the bear would appear, bonfires lit to ward off beast-type monsters. They looked relieved to see the children safe and sound, but also shocked to see the two adventurers who’d rushed in coming back out carrying the monster.

“Girls! You’re okay!”

“Yep, we were able to get the children and come back safely.”

“We killed the bear while we were at it! We’ll butcher it, then we can all eat it!”

“Thank you! And if you’re gonna butcher it, you’d best do it by the well.”

As Teto carried the bear towards the well, the villagers who had been cautiously watching us beat her over there, getting things ready.

And upon Sayah’s return—

“Mom! Dad!”

“Ah, Sayah! We were so worried! Thank goodness you’re safe!”

“I’m so glad you weren’t hurt.”

After getting hugs from her worried parents, she approached the young man who’d warned everyone about the Arktus.

“Sein, I heard you told Chise and Teto where we were. Thank you!”

“Nah, I just... All I could do was tell them...”

“But still, thank you... If you hadn’t, we...”

“Ah, don’t cry. I’ll get stronger. I’ll get stronger so I can protect you right next time, so don’t cry.”

The young man named Sein pulled Sayah, who was belatedly quivering and crying from the fear, close.

“They’re in the springtime of youth...”

“How nice it must be to be young...”

“Lady Witch, it’s autumn right now.”

Sein’s grandfather and I smiled as we watched the young couple, while Teto tilted her head and quipped at us about the wrong thing, still dragging along the bear corpse.

A man wearing comparatively higher-quality clothes than the other villagers came up to us.

“Nice to meet you, adventurers. I’m this village’s mayor, Sam. Thank you for protecting our children and defeating the monster as well.” The mayor spoke humbly, his stiff face showing that he was wary of us. “I would like to speak to you about how to reward you...”

“Reward, huh?”

His face stiffened further as I repeated the word. From his perspective as someone who needed to protect the village, he couldn’t be relieved at the fact that wandering adventurers slew a monster attacking his villagers. We could be an even bigger menace. He was probably going to decide on how to deal with us based on what we wanted in return.

So—

“We don’t need a reward.”

“You don’t need one?”

“Yeah. It wasn’t like we’d taken it as a quest. But we’ve got way too much bear meat on our hands here, so I’d like to give the village more than half, so everyone can eat it.”

“You aren’t taking a reward, and instead you’re giving us the valuable monster parts?” the mayor asked, stunned.

I corrected him. “We’re only giving you the meat. We’ll be taking the magic stone, its fur, its gallbladder... The stuff we can sell. Is that the right answer for you?”

Sein jabbed the mayor lightly in the side, bringing him back to reality and my question.

“Y-yeah. I apologize for testing you like that... Thank you again for protecting our children. If you don’t have anywhere to stay tonight, we can let you use an empty house as thanks. We used to have an inn, but it went under, since the only ones who stayed there were merchants and bureaucrats,” the mayor explained, slipping in some small talk.

“Our negotiations are successful, then.”

On my part, I didn't want to give him a bad impression and, more than anything, I didn't want to threaten him with our status as adventurers. From his perspective, it was much cheaper to let us stay in an empty building than to pay a reward for having slain a C-rank monster.

While the two of us were talking, Teto had already finished taking the Arktus apart.

"Lady Wiiiitch~, I've finished butchering the bear, so please use magic for the rest!"

"All right."

The butchered Arktus corpse was neatly separated by section. The yellow earth-elemental magic stone had been taken out, and the bear's hide had been skinned off in a single piece. Teto had used her black magic sword to cut the bear meat into reasonably sized pieces, and the villagers were carrying it off. The things that there was no use for—like the eyes, stomach, and other guts—would be buried in a hole out by the fields, while the gallbladder, which could be used for medicine, was separated and put inside a leather bag for us.

"You're really good at butchering things, Teto."

"Eh heh heh, Lady Witch praised me!"

In the year since we'd left the pioneer village, Teto had taken apart all of the monsters we slew as we wandered around. In the beginning, she'd only taken out the magic stones and left the rest of the bits in a mess, severely lowering the amount we could get from selling the materials off. Eventually, she brought a monster corpse back to the guild and observed a pro butchering it before practicing herself, over and over again. Being an earthnoid, a new race evolved from a golem, Teto retained the meticulousness and high learning ability of a golem and became able to cleanly butcher monsters.

"Well then, I'll do my part now. *Wash!*"

Making a whirlpool inside an orb of water, I threw the freshly skinned hide into it, washing the dirt and grime from the fur and removing the blood and fat left on the inner side.

"Oooh!"

The villagers all cried out in wonder at the spell's sudden manifestation.

"Now, if I evaporate out the water, dry the skin, and sell it, a professional should be able to tan it quickly." After switching out the water in the orb and rinsing the hide, I used wind magic to evaporate the water from it. Since the hide would be damaged if I used hot air, I used a gentle stream of cool air, taking my time. The villagers watched the hide dance through the air, the eyes of adults and children alike sparkling at the sight of something as foreign to them as magic.

Once I was finished, I carefully balled up the bear hide and nudged it into the pouch-shaped magic bag on my belt, only for the bag to seemingly suck it up. For the bear's gallbladder, I used the *Dry* spell to dry it out without using any heat inside of the leather bag.

And so, after we'd finished dealing with that half of the bear bits, all that was left was a heap of bear meat. In order to entertain their guests, the men brought out the huge pot they used for festivals, and the women brought out the vegetables from their houses and started cooking up the meat.

Teto and I were told to sit things out, so we chatted with the children and elders as we waited.

Chapter 3: Scary Monsters Aren't So Scary When They're in a Hot Pot

Though the Arktus we'd killed had weighed more than four hundred kilograms in total, the meat dropped to half of that at two hundred kilos once it was butchered, with the innards taken out, hide skinned, and bones removed. Plus, the fifty kilos that tasted the best went to us, with two thirds of the one hundred fifty kilos left being the bear's fat.

The wives of the village cut the fat from the meat with knives, slicing the rest of the bear meat thinly before frying it at the bottom of the pot. Then, they added in the veggies they'd sliced up, boiled it all, skimmed the foam, and added in herbs and salt for taste. When they finally added in some wheat dumplings, the bear soup started giving off a delicious smell.

"Here's your bear soup! Take as many seconds as you want!" Sayah said, bringing the finished soup over to us just as the short autumn day was coming to an end.

"Thank you. We'll enjoy it."

"Thanks for the grub!"

Going ahead and taking a sip of the bear soup, I sighed at the warm flavor. They must have boiled the bear fat they'd cut off too, because the sweetness of the fat and the taste of the freshly cooked veggies calmed me. The thinly sliced bear meat, though a bit gamy, gave off more of an umami flavor with each bite. The starch from the potatoes and wheat dumplings had dissolved, giving the broth a thickness that wouldn't go away, warming me to my core.

"Sissy, big sissy! Those mushrooms are the ones we gathered!"

"And those veggies are from my family's field!"

The children had also gotten some soup and happily told us every time they found a mountain mushroom or veggie from their seats around me.

"I see, so it's full of everything you worked hard on gathering. It's delicious."

"The ingredients you guys worked hard on have become a delicious bear soup!"

We praised the children as we ate our soup, and they in turn happily ate their own, going for seconds. I was full after my second bowl, but Teto could eat double that and still go back for more, so I

just watched everyone eat.

“Any scary monster seems a lot less scary when you eat it like this.”

Seemingly having eaten their fill, some of the kids started drifting off into dreamland, so their mothers carried them back home. But as the kids left, the adults started moving to the pub for ale.

Just as everything was finishing up, Sayah came up to us.

“The mayor asked me to lead you guys to the empty house where you’ll be staying.”

“Thanks, Sayah. Let’s go, Teto.”

“Mrghmph... Okaaay!”

Hiding my smile as Teto shoveled the last bowl down her throat, we headed towards the empty house. As we did, I noticed Sayah was carrying a cumbersome pot.

“That looks heavy. Do you want help carrying it?”

“Oh, no, I couldn’t let the guests who saved us carry this for me!”

“Don’t worry. It’s much easier for Teto to carry it! ...Hm? Is this fat?” Teto asked, tilting her head as she looked in the pot she’d taken from Sayah.

“The fat? The stuff they cut off when they were making the soup, right?” I asked.

“Yep. I’m the village herbalist, so I’ll be using this to make a salve. Well, I say that, but I’m just an apprentice. I can’t measure up to what the previous granny who did it could do,” she answered with a wry smile.

“Huh, that’s interesting. I happen to be a mixologist myself.”

“A mixologist? So you make potions? Amazing!”

To most people, rural herbalists and mixologists were two different things. An herbalist used their botanical lore to boil up folk remedies. A mixologist used their mana when mixing herbs, making magical medicines like potions. Since I didn’t know how to use bear fat—or any fat, at that—to make salve, I was interested.

“Can I watch you make that salve?”

“Of course. I make my medicines in a detached building off by the edge of the village.”

From what she said, it seemed the detached building behind the one we’d be staying at was where she’d set up shop. Though it was a bit more difficult to get to on the outskirts of the village, it was better there away from everyone else, since an herbalist’s stock-in-trade trended pungent.

“Where should I put this pot?”

“Ah, just leave it on that table. Thanks for your help. It’s late, so let’s make the salve tomorrow. I’ll show you to that empty house!”

The rest of the trip there was uneventful. The house was

apparently cleaned regularly, with a kitchen and all of the household necessities, plus a bedroom on top of that.

“I’ll bring your breakfast and stuff tomorrow. Good night!”

“Good night, Sayah. Thanks for your hospitality.”

“Thank you! I’m looking forward to breakfast!”

After we said our good nights and saw Sayah off, we saw her light up a lamp in the detached building. As the village doctor, she probably had to process the herbs she’d gathered today.

“It’s great that she’ll be teaching you how to make a new medicine, Lady Witch!”

“Yes, it is. But if we’re doing it tomorrow morning, we should get to sleep so we aren’t late.”

“Okaaay!”

The two of us walked inside, which I lit up with a *Light* spell. Then I used *Clean* to tidy us up a bit before pulling our pajamas from my magic bag.

“Whew. It really feels like the day is over when we change into comfy clothes like this.”

“Teto agrees!”

We’d come to this village for the ruins, but we’d unexpectedly ended up defeating a monster, eating some bear soup, and making a promise to be shown how to make beast fat salve... Our day had been busy. And it might have been because of the forest nearby, but this village kind of gave off the same vibe as the pioneer village we’d stayed in a year earlier.

As I sat down on the bed and ate my daily strange fruit, I checked both Teto’s and my status.

NAME: Chise (Reincarnator)

CLASS: Witch

TITLE: Goddess of the Pioneer Village, C-Rank Adventurer

LEVEL: 60

HP: 1,150/1,150

MP: 13,400/15,400

SKILLS: Staff Martial Arts Lv 3, Origin Magic Lv 7, Body Strengthening Lv 5, Mixing Lv 4, Mana Regeneration Lv 5, Mana Control Lv 7, Mana Isolation Lv 6, various others...

UNIQUE SKILLS: Creation Magic, Slowed Aging

NAME: Teto (Earthnoid)

CLASS: Guardian Swordswoman

TITLE: Witch’s Follower, C-Rank Adventurer

GOLEM CORE MANA: 32,640/32,640

SKILLS: Swordsmanship Lv 6, Shield Proficiency Lv 3, Earth Magic Lv 6, Monstrous Strength Lv 4, Mana Regeneration Lv 3, Subordinate Strengthening Lv 3, Body Strengthening Lv 8, Regeneration Lv 3, various others...

Thanks to my ongoing regimen of one strange fruit a day, even after leaving the pioneer village, my mana pool had grown to around 15,000. And with it, I had suffered some harmful effects.

Since my mana pool had grown so big so fast, my magic had become unstable. Plus, with all that mana constantly leaking from my body, it lit me up like a bonfire to people and monsters with the Mana Perception skill.

It was because of all of that that I'd spent a stint hunting monsters deep in the mountains, away from any people, to level up my Mana Control and Mana Isolation skills. Doing this, I was able to stop the mana from leaking out of my body, raise my ability to control my mana, and get even more efficient with my Body Strengthening. It also gave me a new skill.

Slowed Aging did exactly what it said.

People who used Body Strengthening rejuvenated their bodies, staying in their heyday for longer, and the more mana you had, the longer you'd live. Because of this, I had barely aged in the last year, even after turning thirteen... My body hadn't matured at all.

And Teto—

“Ahhh, the bear's magic stone tastes so rich!”

While I ate my strange fruit, Teto chomped away on the Arktus's magic stone. Since she'd been absorbing the magic stones of all of the monsters we'd slain on our journey, her status and skills had grown from what they were a year before.

“Okay, let's get to sleep.”

“I get to sleep with Lady Witch tonight too!”

Finished with checking our status pages, I let Teto hug me, falling asleep in the bed.



Chapter 4: Knowledge Has a Value That You Can't Buy with Money

In the morning, once I woke up, I opened the window, letting the cool autumn air in. I took a big, refreshing breath, then went back to the bed and shook Teto awake.

"Teto, it's morning. Get up."

"Good morning, Lady Witch! Teto is awake!"

"Heh heh, good morning," I replied, smiling at how Teto was always so good at getting up.

We got changed and washed our faces at the well beside the house.

"Good morning, Sayah."

"Morning!"

"Ah, you're up already. Good morning." Sayah the herbalist was also up early, with a bucket in her hand.

"Getting some water?"

"Yup. Need it to make breakfast, after all."

"Teto will help!"

Really, it would be faster for me to just make some water with magic, but Teto looked like she was having fun dropping the bucket down into the well and pulling it up with the rope, so I just watched.

"Okay, let's make some breakfast," Sayah said energetically, moving to the kitchen of the house to cook us our breakfast.

I used my magic to light a fire in the stove while Teto set out the plates and cutlery. "It's amazing how you can make fire with magic! You really are a mage after all!"

"Yeah? It's just daily living magic. I always conjure fire and water for cooking when we're camping."

"I'm jealous about how much you must save on fuel. I can't use magic, after all," she commented, looking at the steady flame enviously as she cracked a freshly laid egg in the frying pan. She must've been having fun cooking with us; she looked a lot brighter than she had the day before.

The finished breakfast was bread, vegetable soup, sunny-side-up eggs over easy, and a leafy vegetable salad.

"Okay, let's eat!"

"Yes. Thank you for the food."

"It looks delicious! Thank you for the food!"

We ate our crusty bread by soaking it a little in soup, or ripping little pieces off and dipping it in the broken yolks of our eggs. The leafy salad was delicious, maybe because Sayah had made a special dressing from salt, vegetable oil, vinegar, and a little bit of dried herbs.

“How is it...?” Sayah asked nervously as we ate.

“It’s delicious. Warm and calming.”

“I want seconds!”

She heaved a little sigh of relief when she heard our opinions, and made Teto’s seconds with a smile on her face.

After the meal, we had a little break drinking Sayah’s original blend of herb tea before we all headed to the detached building.

“Making salve from animal fat is a really hard job.”

“I see.”

“Yep! It takes more than a day or two to do, but I’ll try to show you as much of it as I can!”

“Teto will help with this too! Leave the physical work to me!”

Sayah brought out the pot full of Arktus fat and a bunch of other tools—knives and such. She looked more like a witch than I did.

“I’ll walk you through the process first. Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“All ready!”

I pulled the book I used to record my mixing from my magic bag. Not only did it contain the recipes I’d learned from the pioneer village’s mixologist adventurer, but the recipes from books I’d found over the past year, folk medicine, and other pharmaceutical ingredients too.

When I opened my book, Sayah peered over curiously. “What’s that, Chise?”

“A book for recording. I write down the order in which to do things when mixing, how much of each ingredient to use... All the potion brewing shortcuts and improvements on the standard formulae I’ve figured out go in here too.”

“Can I see?” she asked, and I handed her the book to read from the beginning. She flipped through it all; the mixologist potion recipes, folk medicine, tricks for adding mana, undiscovered magical medicine recipes, records of experiments on confirmed effectiveness, all of it. There wasn’t much there, but she read it all, heaving a heavy sigh as she carefully handed it back to me.

“I really am jealous. Like I said before, if I had magic, I could save on fire fuel, and if I could make potions, I could make even better medicine,” she murmured softly at the massive difference between a normal herbalist and a mixologist.

“...Do you want me to make you a copy? It might help you

become a mixologist.”

If I wrote her out a copy of my book, she'd have a chance at becoming one, albeit through self-study rather than by feeling.

Sayah was shocked, flustered by my offer. “Huh?! I could never be a mixologist! And you can't just copy a book and give it away like that! They're really valuable!”

In the year and change I'd spent reincarnated here, I'd put together that information spread much more slowly than I was used to, and most people kept their useful knowledge a secret. It was a big deal to get something as stuffed with knowledge as a book, and Sayah seemed to know that. That was why she was so covetous of the book in the first place.

“I'll make a copy for you by the time we leave the village.”

“Chise?!”

“That's just how Lady Witch is! And you're a good person, Sayah, so we want you to have it!”

“Teto too?!” Sayah took a few deep breaths to calm herself. “Stop teasing me like that. Let's get to making that salve already.”

“You're right. So will you tell me how to do it?”

We'd gone a bit off track, but she began teaching me how to make salve from animal fats you'd get from hunting animals like bears, deer, and boars.

“We've got the leather gloves out, since we'll be touching the straining cloth and hot oil,” she explained, pulling them off of a nearby shelf. “Teto, can you go get some water from the well, just like you did this morning for breakfast?”

“Got it!” Teto replied, taking the water bucket from Sayah and heading out to the well for water.

While Teto was gone, Sayah taught me how to get the fat ready.

“First, we closely dice the fat before putting it in the pot, so it'll melt nice and easy.”

She tossed the fat she'd cut into the pot, then poured the water Teto had just brought in after and heated it to a rolling boil, stirring it all with a wooden spoon as it melted down.

I'd lit the stove with fire magic to save on firewood, just as I had when we made breakfast. They needed to gather as much firewood as they could before winter, or else they'd freeze through it. Making salve from animal fat during that time used up both firewood and time. Apparently, they usually made salve in fall and winter while warming themselves, using animal fat they'd stored through the rest of the year.

I copied all the folklore that Sayah was giving me down alongside the formula in my book.

“Chise, are you getting all of this?”

“Yes, I’m writing it all down,” I answered as she made sure to check every single step.

Once all of the bear fat had melted into the pot’s hot water, Sayah gave her next instructions.

“Now we strain out the oil.”

She poured the bear fat and water through a straining cloth into another pot. Then, she put on her leather gloves and picked out the piping hot chunks of fat still left in the straining cloth and squeezed out the oil.

“Hot, hot, hot, hot! You’re okay, Teto?!”

“I’m fine~!”

Sayah was nervous wringing it out, despite wearing gloves, while former golem Teto squeezed hard, not minding the heat one bit. And so the little bits of bear meat and blood left from cutting the fat off were removed, leaving strained, clean bear fat in the pot.

“So you filter the oil another five or six times after this to get all the impurities out. Then you harden the oil in cold well water or snow to finish up things for the day.”

“It really is hard. So the salve is done after that?”

“Nope. After that, you need to pick the dirt and impurities out of the hardened oil, then cut it up and melt it in water again before cooling and hardening it again. Then you repeat the process another five times or so.”

“So it’s that much work?” I figured you could probably speed things up by using isolation magic once you got to a certain point. I jotted down a note to that effect.

“So we’re done for today!”

“Sayah, thank you for teaching me how to make a salve.”

“Thanks!”

She looked a bit bashful about us expressing our gratitude. “I’m gonna go out collecting firewood. What are you two going to do?” she asked, hiding her embarrassment by changing the subject.

“Figured we’d check out the ruins. That’s why we came here, after all.”

“I’m excited to see what kind of place it is!”

“Then I’ll show you guys the way while I’m gathering!” Sayah said, covering the oil with a lid to keep the dust out and putting the whole pot in an even bigger one filled with cold well water. “Let’s get going then.”

Once the separate building was all cleaned up, we followed her towards the ruins.

Chapter 5: Treasure Left in the Ruins

“I’ll show you guys the way to the ruins.”

Led by Sayah, who had a wooden rack on her back for gathering firewood, Teto and I headed to the ruins. We left the village, going the complete opposite way from where we’d defeated the Arktus.

As we helped her gather up fallen sticks, Sayah the villager told us more about the ruins.

“The kids use these ruins as a playground. And since the temperature is controlled inside, we also use it to take breaks inside during the summer.” Nearby residents apparently also used it to get out of the rain during sudden downpours.

“How is the monster situation? This is exactly the type of place they’d live.”

“It seems there’s some lingering anti-monster effect or something, so it’s safe. Since the insides are pretty beat up, we don’t use it for much but resting around the entrance. Ah, but once every few years, the kids go on an ‘adventure’ deep inside, and the adults have to go in looking for them,” Sayah explained, with a wry smile on her face.

Teto and I listened, nodding along.

“Ah, we can see it now. Those are the ruins!”

The ruins were set inside a small hill, trees cut down in front to build it wide. The entrance had a retrofitted roof and a door to keep wild animals out.

“So those are the ruins, huh? Do you notice what I notice, Teto?” I asked her, voice quiet.

“Yep. It’s sucking the mana from its surroundings,” Teto replied with a nod.

You could see the flow of mana if you focused your body’s mana into your eyes. These ruins seemed to be drawing the ambient mana from the local population and the environs, sucking the rest from the select monsters who came close. That was why it had a so-called ‘anti-monster effect.’

“Are you okay, Teto?”

“I’m fine. This much is okay!”

Teto was an earthnoid, a race evolved from a golem. Inside her body was a golem core, and because she operated using the mana from that core, she was technically classified as a demon. The ruins were thirsty for her mana. But Teto was no ordinary monster—she

knew Body Strengthening, which let her redirect her own mana flow back into her own system.

“Well, anyway, this amount of mana is nothing for us.”

The villagers didn’t have much mana in the first place. My natural mana regeneration was more than enough to cover that little bit of mana output. On Teto’s part, she could eat magic stones or have me use *Charge* to replenish her mana, so it was no problem for her either.

“This is the entrance. Come inside.”

“Thank you. Let’s get exploring these ruins.”

“I’m so excited!”

Following Sayah inside, the first thing I saw was the dusky blue stone of the halls. The space was about half the typical dimensions of a dungeon, but they weren’t small enough to pose a human any trouble.

“It’s not that dark.”

“The floor is kinda glowing!”

The entranceway was filled with dirt and rocks displaced by storms and human traffic, letting moss that glowed with trace mana grow.

“It looks a little mystic, but it’s still too dark. *Light!*”

Once I’d finished conjuring up a light source, we pressed on. Though I was worried it would get even darker as we went inside as the soil thinned out, light actually poured in from holes made from tree roots eating into the ruins.

“There’s a big room a little farther in that leads to other hallways!”

Apparently that room was where the children used to play. Inside it were decent-sized rocks (probably brought in from the forest) set out like chairs; light streamed in from a broken spot in the ceiling. Other than that, there were sticks, rags, and near-broken lanterns that the kids had brought in littered around everywhere, like a secret base. I had to smile when I saw marks on the wall where generations of children had carved their names with rocks.

“So this is what the ruins are like.”

“Do you two have any new findings, seeing the ruins?”

“Nope. We came because we were curious, but we don’t have any special knowledge or anything.”

“Teto came along with Lady Witch~!”

I picked up a nearby shard from the ruins and used my appraising monacle on it. According to that, it was made of materials that used the ambient mana to reinforce itself. It looked like it had been abandoned partway through construction around eight hundred years earlier by people skilled at building with magic. Appearances suggested it might have been a small group’s summer home or

something that just ended up buried after a natural disaster.

“It seems that it might have been left after a turf war with monsters long ago.”

A sudden, dramatic surge in monster activity drove the human presence from the area and tilted its ecological balance in the monsters’ favor; under their occupation, vegetation and such ran wild and strange while structures collapsed. The site should have decayed to nothing, but mana had preserved its shape, waiting for humanity to return and reclaim these newly minted “ruins.” Mana had unmade the land as it once was, and in turn it had sustained its last vestiges.

“I don’t think I’ve seen any inscriptions or anything like that. Ah, but will you guys come with me over there? There’s something great there!”

“Something great?”

“I’m interested!”

Sayah started steering us through the hallway to the right; she’d piqued Teto’s and my curiosity.

“Come over here!”

As Sayah ran ahead to show us, Teto and I exchanged glances before following. Through the right hallway, at the end of the ruins, was a little room.

“This is where it is!”

She turned back, pointing towards a spot where water flowed from a crack in the floor, and you could see the sky through a hole in the ceiling. There, vines absorbed the water and grew up the walls and ceiling, covered in blooming flowers.



“It’s pretty!”

“This is the only place near the village where these flowers bloom!”

“So you wanted to show us the flowers...”

While Teto honestly marveled over what Sayah had wanted to show us, I was surprised at the unexpected fortunate turn. Sayah watched our reactions proudly, picking a single flower and plucking the petals.

“You can taste some sweet nectar if you suck on the petals like this,” she explained as she showed us how, saying that every kid in the village had done it at least once.

Mimicking her as she happily sucked on the flower’s nectar, Teto and I each plucked a petal off.

“It’s true. It’s a little bit sweet.”

“It’s sweet! But it’s kind of not enough.”

The sweet nectar must have been collected in the base of the petals, because when you pressed on it with your lips, its sweetness spread through your mouth before disappearing. Teto didn’t seem satisfied with it, because she pulled another two or three petals out and put them in her mouth. Sayah and I smiled, seeing Teto enjoy it just like a kid.

This flower Sayah and the villagers treasured rivaled the value of the ruin trip in itself for me.

“I don’t know what kind of flower it is, but my grandfather says everyone’s sucked on the nectar since before he was even born.”

“Roniseras. The silverbloom Roniseras.”

“...Roniseras? Metal?”

“It’s a rare climbing herb known as a Roniseras. It’s called ‘silverbloom’ because a spoonful of its white flower’s nectar sells for ten silver pieces.”

I pulled an herbal encyclopedia out of my magic bag and flipped to the page where an accurate illustration was labeled as *Roniseras*, along with that anecdote, what magical medicines it could be used for, and what illnesses it was used to treat.

“Ten silver for a spoonful... W-We’ve been sucking on something ridiculously valuable like it was some wildflower.”

I side-eyed Teto (still sucking flower nectar without a care in the world) as Sayah’s eyes were glued to the encyclopedia page before she dropped down and curled into a ball, aghast. In order to calm her down, I opened the next page to explain the rest of the story.

“It’s okay. The flower’s nectar doesn’t store long, so aristocrats buy it up as a niche delicacy.”

“R-really?”

“Yeah. The part with medicinal value is actually the vine. It’s good for breaking fevers, pain relief, and calming the respiratory system.” By mixing it with a number of other reagents and adding mana, it could also be used as medication against a particular communicable disease.

“I see...”

The way Sayah calmed down after hearing she’d jumped the proverbial gun about its market value was textbook lower-middle class.

I kept quiet about the fact that if you processed the Roniseras vine the right way, a small bag of it would sell for more than a few silvers.

Chapter 6: Repeating Meetings and Goodbyes

After harvesting some of the Roniseras vine growing naturally in the ruins, we left and returned to the village.

“Thank you for today. From tomorrow on, the two of us will go inspect the ruins in detail.”

“Thanks for showing us the way! It was fun!”

“I should be thanking you for teaching me about a valuable herb. I’ll tell my parents and have the mayor and everyone discuss how we can protect it.”

Having brought back some actual Roniseras vine, we stopped by the herbalist’s workshop to drop off the firewood Sayah had collected from the forest into the woodshed. From there we went to tell the mayor about the vine.

“I see. So if we dry it, we can save it for an extended period of time to use in the village, or bring it elsewhere to sell. Sayah, can I ask you to do that for us?”

Hearing our case, the mayor stared intently at the herb encyclopedia and the vine we’d brought back, smiling cheerfully before requesting that Sayah dehydrate the herb. The book didn’t have the full process, just a basic one, but she would be able to use her skills to deal with it properly according to the usual rule of thumb.

“We’ll help.”

“Teto can do the physical tasks~!”

“Thank you, Chise and Teto.”

And so, after we dried out the Roniseras vine and ate dinner, Sayah went back to her home, while Teto and I went back to the empty house we were borrowing.

“All that’s left is to sleep, Lady Witch.”

“Yes, but there’s something I want to do before I sleep. *Creation!*”

Before bed, I used my Creation Magic to create a white paper book. I copied down not only what was in my mixing notes, but the animal fat salve recipe I’d been taught today and a selection of passages from my herb encyclopedia on common herbs and Roniseras vine.

“Lady Witch? Are you copying over the book you want to give Sayah?”

“Yep.”

A mixologist's skills were dependent on their mana pool and the person's talents, but the knowledge itself wouldn't go to waste.

"Isn't it hard writing it all out? You should make a tool that copies it in a second, or just Create the whole book instead."

If I had a magic tool like a modern printing press or copier, I could quickly copy the contents onto paper, or I could just use my Creation Magic to Create a book with the exact same content.

I chose my words carefully as I explained why not to Teto. "That's true. It's so no one will get suspicious. It's impossible to have two books bound exactly the same way, with exactly the same words. Ah, but that's just my surface answer, huh?"

"Surface answer? What about your real one?"

"Really, I think writing something by hand makes it warmer, more from the heart," I answered, smiling bitterly; it was a little embarrassing to say it that plainly. "But it really is a pain to copy it all by hand."

"Hrmnnnn... I don't really get it, since I'm happy to get anything from you, Lady Witch," Teto said with a pout from her seat on the bed.

I looked at her out of the corner of my eye as I copied my mixing knowledge onto the paper. But I had one problem—

"Urgh, I'm not very good at drawing."

Though I was fine with copying text, it seemed that I wasn't good at drawing detailed plants.

Teto stood up. "Lady Witch, Teto will help!"

"Ah, thanks. Can you draw the plants for me, then?"

"On it!"

Partway through, I left copying the book to Teto. Thanks to her golem's precision, she could memorize a drawing from a book and copy it out exactly. I couldn't help but watch her draw in admiration.

"It's done! Lady Witch, how does it look?!"

"Amazing. It's perfect."

And so, despite the fact that I got her to draw the pictures cleanly, copying the book was *not* something we could finish in one day, and a yawn slipped from my lips as fatigue hit me.

"Lady Witch, you look sleepy, so we're sleeping now."

"Kyah?! Teto, I can get into bed without you carrying me."

"Teto carried you over because if she didn't, you'd try to stay up later," Teto replied, carrying me in her arms over to the bed after I yawned.

"Oh jeez. Good night, Teto. Let's work hard tomorrow too."

"Okay!"

And like that, I fell asleep in bed with Teto.

The next morning, after eating breakfast with Sayah, Teto and I

headed back to the ruins. Teto used Earth Magic to locate the collapsed bits of the ruins and parts we hadn't seen yesterday, moving the dirt and rocks and reinforcing the ceiling as we investigated. Unfortunately, there was next to no treasure left, but I amused myself copying down patterns left on the walls and imagining how the ruins must have looked back in the days from what tells remained. At night, I had Teto help me as I copied my mixing notes and the herb encyclopedia into the paper book.

The days continued to pass, and we finished both investigating the ruins and copying the book. And on the morning of our fifth day there

"We finished checking out the ruins yesterday, so we'll be leaving the village today."

"You've been good to us!"

"Huh...?"

When we told Sayah of our plans during breakfast, which we'd eaten with her every day, she looked as if she didn't know what I was saying for a second. I just kept on saying my bit.

"We more or less cleaned up the empty house we were borrowing, so could you tell the mayor for us?"

"Wait! This is too sudden! Can't you stay a bit longer? And don't you have to prepare? Maybe, uh...three more days?" Gradually processing what I had said, Sayah tried to stop us from leaving. But I just gave her a troubled look and shook my head. "...Why? Do you hate our village?"

"No, the village is lovely. It's peaceful, blessed by the forest. And you're a good person, Sayah."

"It was fun to spend time with you!"

Sayah gave me a pleading look, asking why, and I answered. "Winter is coming soon. We have to leave before we can't because of the cold and snow..."

In the winter, once the snow set in, even adventurers had a rough time traveling. Furthermore, it was harder to do slaying and gathering quests, so they moved to bigger cities and towns near dungeons in search of a more stable living.

But that was just what we were telling her. For us, we could live in any environment, thanks to my Creation Magic and huge mana pool. The reality was that the longer we stayed somewhere, the harder it got for us to leave, like back at the pioneer village.

"And we have a goal."

"...A goal?"

"Lady Witch and I are going to find the Wasteland of Nothingness!" Teto announced powerfully, getting a nod from me too. The location had fascinated me when I'd stumbled upon it in a travel

log, and we'd searched for it ever since.

As we just looked at her silently, unable to tell her the full story, Sayah seemed to understand, even if she didn't accept it. "I thought I'd made friends, and you're already leaving."

We'd only been there a short time, but we'd spent most of our visit with her. She was confused now that we were suddenly up and leaving.

Both Teto and I spoke to her.

"I think of you as a friend too, Sayah."

"We might never see each other again, but a friend is still a friend!"

Our bond with her would persist—one more friend from the road. And even if we'd only meet her once, we wanted to treasure it.

"...I really knew. You're adventurers. You'd leave one day... But wait just a bit!"

Sayah stood up and ran to her herbalist building, coming back with a little pot. "I got it ready for when you'd leave. I'm glad I finished it in time!" she said, opening the little pot to show a white lump.

"Wow, that looks yummy!"

"Sayah, is this salve?"

"Yep. That huge chunk of fat was only able to make this much salve."

It was the salve, made from the pure Arktus fat being boiled over and over again to remove the impurities. I took it from her as she joked, admitting she'd taken half of it herself.

"Since winter is coming, use it to keep those pretty hands of yours safe," she said, gently rubbing our hands after we took the pot.

Since she'd given us something, I figured it was time to give her what we'd made as well.

"We would like to give this to Sayah, our friend."

"We both worked on it!"

I reached into my Magic Bag, pulling up the copied book Teto and I spent nights on.

Sayah's eyes grew huge as she took it. "Really? You're really giving this to me?!" she asked, accepting our gift as if she was treasuring it.

Once we calmed down and finished our breakfast, we went and let the mayor know about our sudden departure.

Then— "Come again!"

All of the villagers gathered to see us off, and we waved, leaving the village with the ruins for a bigger town.

Chapter 7: How Adventurers Spend the Winter

After leaving the village with the ruins, Teto and I went to the nearest large town and sorted the contents of our magic bags in the inn room we rented.

“We’ve collected a lot of different stuff.”

“Everything here is a precious memory with Lady Witch!”

After we had left the pioneer village, we’d stopped at villages off the highway like the one we’d just left as we wandered where we pleased. Before we’d stopped in the village with ruins, we’d gone through numerous villages plying our many trades. In the villages where they didn’t have much money, we bartered for rare seeds from each town instead.

“One day, when we’ve found a place for ourselves, I want to plant these.”

“All of those veggies were delicious!”

Thoughts to that effect kept our minds occupied as we checked the seeds we kept in a little cotton-lined foxglove tree box before putting it back in our magic bag.

For the money we couldn’t get in the little villages, we sometimes stopped in the adventurer’s guilds of larger towns, turning in the materials from monsters we’d slain or herbs we’d picked. This time, after cleaning up our bags, we headed to the guild to sell the materials from the Arktus we’d defeated back in the village with the ruins.

“Excuse me, but would you be able to buy these materials from us?”

“Understood. Please wait one moment.”

Teto and I brought the Arktus hide, claws, and gallbladder to the sales counter in the guild, and waited as they squared it away.

“Miss Chise, Miss Teto, I apologize for leaving you waiting. Here is what you made from selling off the Arktus materials.”

“Thank you.”

“Ooh, we got a lot!”

We’d sold the useful parts of the bear other than its meat and magic stone for a total of thirty silver—a pretty good haul.

“I added a bit extra, since the hide is more in demand with winter coming, and because everything was so well prepared.”

“Thank you very much.”

“The two of you must be very skilled, to be C-rank at your age and defeat something so cleanly.”

“We were just lucky. We’ll be going, then.”

“Thank you. Lady Witch, let’s go get lunch!”

After taking our money, Teto and I left the guild in search of a food cart to buy lunch from. After what had been said to us at the sales counter, I thought back to all the work we’d done as adventurers until now.

We’d left the pioneer village, and traveled where we wanted, in the general direction of Dungeon City. Since we’d gone off track and stopped in a lot of little villages, we hadn’t stopped in many bigger towns. But when we did, we took quests and sold our monster drops, contributing more to the adventurer’s guild.

With our guild cards, not only our quests, but our spoils added tiny bits to our contribution level. There had been C- and D-rank monsters menacing the villages we’d stopped in on our journey, and we’d also hunted some B-rank monsters too, turning in everything but the magic stones and edible parts.

Though we’d been on our way to Dungeon City, we’d gone on so many side trips that a year had passed, and we were C-rank before we knew it. Normally, we would have had to take an exam to rise up, but since the guildmaster in Darryl had seen that we were powerful enough to be C, we got to skip it and had automatically risen to that rank.

We traveled where we pleased, defeated monsters in the villages and towns we stopped in, earned money, and Teto and I got to be together. It wasn’t a bad life.

But—

“Hah... Life just doesn’t go like you want it to,” I sighed to myself as we left the guild.

“Lady Witch? All your happiness will run away if you sigh like that. Do you want a meat skewer?”

“Thanks, Teto. I do.” Taking the offered meat skewer that Teto had already bought from a yummy-looking food cart, I thought about our goal again. “All that traveling and we still haven’t found the Wasteland of Nothingness.”

In our year of travel, we’d searched for information on the Wasteland of Nothingness and found, fittingly, *jack*. On top of that, the villages and forests where we’d stopped on the way had felt nice, but weren’t the type of place the two of us could live long term.

“We still haven’t found a place suitable for us to live, huh...?”

“Really? There were lots of yummy places,” Teto commented, drooling as she thought back to a spot called the Demon Den.

Within the Kingdom of Ischea was an area humans hadn’t been

able to develop because it was infested with strong monsters. The monsters in this Demon Den had very high-quality magic stones. To Teto, with her bottomless appetite for magic stones, it was a smorgasbord.

“Stopping in little villages and towns didn’t get us info on the Wasteland of Nothingness.”

“Then Teto would like to go to a dungeon ASAP! I want lots of yummy magic stones!”

“Yeah. Since Dungeon City is also the former capital, there might be a lot of books and documents there. And it’s nearly winter.”

The year before, I’d spent my first winter in this other world. With snow, it was a lot harder to get from town to town, and quest difficulty skyrocketed. That was why it was normal for adventurers to stay in one town to work.

We did the same, staying in one town all winter, but honestly? We were bored stiff. About all Teto did was go to the guild’s training grounds to sweat it off, while I temporarily worked as a mixologist, making medication for communicable diseases.

“Do you want to settle down in Dungeon City all winter and work as adventurers?”

“Absolutely!”

“Then let’s go.”

I pulled a simple map out of my magic bag. I’d drawn it up from information we’d gotten from adventurers and employees from the guild we’d met on our travels. Thanks to that, I’d finished a rough map of the important towns in the northern part of the kingdom of Ischea.

“Hmm... Dungeon City’s name was—Apanemis, right?”

The Old Capital Apanemis used to be the royal capital of the kingdom. It had moved because they’d needed to move the royals for their own protection after a dungeon appeared within it, going to the next most prosperous town instead. Since then, Apanemis had developed an industry centered around the dungeon, becoming “Dungeon City.”

“Let’s go to Dungeon City!”

“We’ll have to plan for how we’ll live there.”

Teto and I chatted about it lightly as if it was a spur-of-the-moment road trip, finally approaching the city that had been our aim for more than a year.

Chapter 8: It's Important to Give 'Em Some Hard Discipline Right at the Start

"Hey, girls! Lookin' forward to working with you!"

"Yes, we're looking forward to working with you as well."

Since just heading to Dungeon City would have been too dull, Teto and I'd accepted a quest to guard a bunch of traders traveling in that direction. In the year we'd been detouring, we'd guarded people a number of times after saving them from attacks by monsters or thieves, so despite not going through the guild, we *did* have some experience.

When we showed the quest-giver our guild cards after taking the escort quest, they looked shocked.

"You two are C-rank, at your young age?"

"We just ranked up, actually."

"You're outstanding!"

Internally, I was relieved that he didn't look down on me in my mage getup with my hood pulled low.

And so, the other adventurers who had taken the quest started gathering. As we all introduced ourselves to each other, one party gave us unpleasant glares before rising to confront us.

"What the hell are we gonna do if this chick and her kid mess up our escort quest? Or is their scheme to get the rest of us to protect them while they rake in the rewards?"

"Oi, stop that! These two are proper C-rank!"

"Hah! They must've just joined up with some party somewhere and leeches off their experience! There's no way a woman and a little girl are higher ranked than us!"

I heaved a heavy sigh at their disdain from under my hood. Chauvinism abounded among adventurers. Sure, it was a heavily male-dominated field, but there were outstanding female adventurers too—I thought a little less of the adventurers we'd need to work with for not stopping the other members of their party.

"C'mon, say something, you little brat!"

The adventurer sassing us kept glaring and took a step closer.

Fine. If you want a fight, you've got one.

"Teto."

"Roger!"

I gave the order as if I was used to it, and Teto moved very

naturally to punch the adventurer sassing us in the gut. Everyone around us was stunned, unable to stop what was happening, while the guy who had been punched fell to a crouch, clutching his stomach. The impact of the hit went right through his leather armor.

I thrust my staff out towards the adventurer. “Well then—*Heal*.”

The guy who Teto had punched raised his head as the healing magic lessened his pain. It looked like the gut punch knocked him out for a second, because he looked dazed.

“Urgh, I...”

“Teto wanted you to know: play stupid games, win stupid prizes.”

“You bitch, how dare—”

“Blam!”

The adventurer came at us again, so this time, Teto gave him a left straight directly to his face. And, since he’d used Body Strengthening to guard this time, she’d put even more power into it. Thanks to that, he flew back, bouncing off the ground once before collapsing.

“Okay, you’re still alive? You’re not an adventurer for nothing, huh? *Heal*.”

Healed a second time, the guy stood up, looking at us with terror in his eyes. “Wh-what the hell *are* you two...?!”

“Now, do you understand how strong we are?” I asked, a bright smile on my face as I used my mana to intimidate the adventurers who had looked down on us. That set them off trembling, so I let them go, only for the lot of them to get a talking-to from the rest of their companions.

After all of that, the lead adventurer on the escort quest gave Teto and me a big smile and struck up a conversation with us; he’d been watching everything.

“That was awful, huh? You’re pretty damn good with managing your mana, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am. How did you know?”

“The amount of mana comin’ off of you is much less than the average mage. When I gave you a more careful look, I could tell you don’t let a bit go to waste. But the only ones who could tell like this are us C-ranks,” the senior adventurer told us kindly.

So basically, D-ranks might look down at us, but C-ranks could tell we were worthy of the rank, even if they couldn’t tell exactly how much mana we had.

“We’ve only been adventurers for about a year, so it would be a big help if you gave us more advice.”

“Leave it to me. In exchange, we’ll be countin’ on that healing magic of yours during the quest,” said the leader, giving us one warning in our short conversation. “The adventuring trade is a show,

so your response was great. But it's best if they don't look down on you in the first place."

This time, my control over my mana was *too* good, which the D-rank adventurers couldn't see. It seemed that if I'd let my mana flow out a little bit more at the beginning, it would have been a deterrent; maybe it wouldn't have shown that I'm a rank above, but they'd have known they'd get more than they bargained for if they messed with me.

"I see... Hm, like this?"

"Is this much good for Teto?"

"You're real good, doin' it on the fly like that. Anyway, we'll be countin' on ya."

Around the time that Teto and I had changed up our natural mana output to a level that the senior adventurer approved of, it was time for the caravan to set off, and thus the beginning of our escort quest.

The adventurers who had messed with us seemed much busier being afraid of us than they were doing their actual job of keeping watch. Teto and I just ignored them and focused on work.

When we camped out, I ended up selling the instant soup I'd made with my Creation Magic beforehand to the other adventurers and the merchants we were guarding for three copper a cup. The guys who'd sassed us seemed to want some too, but hesitated to ask, just watching from afar. That night, while we were taking turns keeping watch, I went to sleep in my tent.

The next day, as we continued on down the highway, guarding the caravan, I realized something. The problem group of adventurers seemed a little distracted, not being as careful as they should have.

"Hmmm... What to do...?"

"What's wrong, Lady Witch?"

As I muttered to myself during a caravan-wide break, Teto questioned me. I decided to talk it out with her so I could get my own thoughts in order.

"I wanted to offer the adventurers from before a little backup, but they're on guard against us, so I didn't think they'd accept any help."

Staying on guard for our escort quest through the cold pre-winter nights, it seemed like their fear and anxiety towards Teto and me was dividing their attention.

"Yeah? But you don't need to protect them, Lady Witch. Our escort quest only covers the merchants and their cargo."

"Yeah, but..."

I smiled bitterly at Teto's frank statement. It was true that technically it'd all be fine for us as long as we got the merchants and their cargo safely to their destination. Even if other adventurers got wiped out on the way, that would all be on them for not being as

skilled as they should be.

But—

“I was just wondering if letting adventurers who weren’t careful enough guard the caravan would be considered handling the quest-giver in bad faith.”

We should have conducted ourselves in a way that didn’t cause problems from the get-go, but the adventurers who had come at us were so on guard against us that they’d never listen to a word we said.

“But you’d absolutely save everyone, wouldn’t you?”

“...Yeah, I would.”

I smirked self-deprecatingly when Teto said that. Even if they’d refuse our help out of wariness, I would do everything in my power to save them. The quest-giver, the cargo, and even the adventurers working with us.

The caravan continued on, and near sunset, Teto and I sensed a monster.

“One midsize monster getting itself ready for winter. Is it looking for food?”

“It’s sniffing at the ground. Ah... It’s coming this way!”

One of the rear wagons was carrying food, and it looked like that was what the monster was targeting. It was steadily closing in on the caravan.

“Monster, coming from the grove to the left rear! There’s one!”

“Adventurers on guard, protect the wagons and the merchants! Another few parties, come with me to take down the monster!”

After Teto and I sensed it, the other adventurers did too, and the leader started throwing out orders. Teto and I followed him to go take care of the monster, only for the thing to jump out of the thicket and charge towards the food wagon.

“Brgiiiiiiii!”

“It’s a bighorn boar! What a pain! Teto and I will go on ahead!”

The monster that had broken from the trees was a large boar-type monster, with brown, bristly hair and large, warped horns and tusks—a bighorn boar. It could toss you up with its huge twisted horns and tusks, attack you from down low, or hit you with a Body Strengthened tackle with its massive bulk. Its hard body hair and subcutaneous fat also stopped blades. It was a C-rank monster, but its charge alone put it on the same level of offensive power as a B-rank.

Teto and I used Body Strengthening to get ourselves to the back wagon in an instant to protect it, but the adventurers who had come at us days earlier had their swords drawn and were in the monster’s path.

“I... We, we’re adventurers, here to guard this caravan! I can do it too!”

“YEAHHH!”

“Wait, stop! Going from the front is too dangerous!”

It seemed that their plan was to throw the problem adventurer directly in front of the bighorn boar while his buddies attacked from both sides. The boar did slow down a tiny bit with weapons coming at it from three directions. But the front adventurer’s sword got knocked away by the boar’s horns and tusks, and he got headbutted up into the air. Its bristles repelled his comrades’ blades, and each was knocked down with either body tackles or kicks with the boar’s back legs.

“Teto, I’ll get the adventurers, you take care of the boar!”

“Roger!”

I flew up and caught the adventurer who’d been knocked into the air, then used my dark magic *Psychokinesis* to move the other two guys who’d collapsed to safer ground.

With the adventurers out of its way, the bighorn boar once again started charging at the wagon with the food.

“You look like some yummy meat. And you’re so big and plump... Sluuuurp...”

Kicking up a cloud of dirt, the charging boar seemed to be thinking of nothing but knocking Teto out of its path like it had with the adventurer before, then smashing through the wagon to the vittles inside.

“U-urgh... It’s impossible. It just knocked us right out easy...”

The three adventurers who got knocked away had used Body Strengthening at the last instant to guard, so none of them had life-threatening wounds.

“Teto will be fine. But you’re all hurt, so sit still—*Heal*.”

I healed them as they watched Teto square off with the boar.

“Come at me!”

Teto pulled out her black magic sword and set herself up to stab, and when the bighorn boar got close enough, she charged in, thrusting.

“Brgyah?!”

The boar’s skull—the hardest part of the monster, used to crush anything and everything with a headbutt or a charge—was pierced right through by Teto’s magic sword. Teto didn’t even budge an inch from the boar’s charge, having perfectly absorbed the blow. The bighorn boar’s eyes rolled back in its head as it collapsed, stone dead, with a length of cold steel sheathed in its brain.

“Lady Wiiiitch, I’m dooone~! And I left the meat and materials all nice!”

“Good job, Teto. Now, you all need to help clearing things up. Our escort quest isn’t done yet.”

Teto had pulled her magic sword out of the boar’s skull and was

waving to me, so I waved back, walking with the adventurers I'd just healed.

"Amazing... So *that's* what the difference between a D-rank adventurer and a C-rank one looks like."

"Nah, they're way stronger than the other C-ranks protecting the caravan."

"They're way closer to B than C, aren't they?"

While the D-rank adventurer trio that I'd healed whispered among themselves, the leader and his group, who'd headed to defeat the monster with us, caught up.

"You're done already? Let's clean things up here and keep an eye out for any other monsters attracted by the scent of blood. Can you give me your report?"

"Yes."

The trio behind me hung their heads in silence, thinking I was about to tell the leader about them trying to take the monster out on their own.

"Teto and I went ahead to protect the food wagon from the bighorn boar. By the time we reached the back wagon, the boar had come close. These men risked themselves to buy us time to get there. After that, Teto stabbed the bighorn boar through the skull. Luckily, there was no damage to the wagon."

The three adventurers' heads shot up, eyes wide at my report. They'd thought they would get blamed for disrupting the harmony of the quest team by acting on their own, but were shocked to hear me say they'd done us a service.

"N-no! We couldn't beat it... We just got destroyed! And the girls probably would've gotten there in time, even without us... We're sorry for acting alone!"

As the trio tried to report their own failings, the leader and his group just laughed, shoulders shaking.

"Or so these guys say... Which was it?"

"There's no need to think about whether or not we could have made it in time, since it's all speculation anyway. The truth is that in risking themselves to stop the boar, they allowed other adventurers to make it in time, and there was no damage to the caravan. That's all."

When I said that, Teto smiled pleasantly at me. Thinking she was definitely going to tell me I wasn't being honest, I pulled my hood down and looked away.

"I see. Yeah, our job is to protect both these merchants' loves and wallets, but you acting reckless isn't gonna protect shit. We're a team, so you've gotta watch how the team works and learn," the leader admonished the trio, who nodded, regretting their actions.

Though the guys had been against us at the beginning, now there

were no ill feelings at all.

“Miss Chise, Teto, ma’am, you got anything you need help with?”

“Anything!”

“Ah... No. I’ve got nothing going on right now, so do whatever you want.”

“How about play-fighting with Teto? Come at me!”

“Thank you very much!”

They were way, *way* far from having ill feelings. Now they were taken with us. Every time we had a break, they’d come talk to us, or get the snot beaten out of them in mock battles with Teto. And since they’d be a hindrance to the escort quest like that, I’d always use my healing magic to fix up their wounds and stamina.

As an aside, we stowed the body of the bighorn boar we took down in our magic bag to be brought to our campsite. We took it apart and used the meat to eat yakiniku with the rest of the adventurers, and we sold the horns, tusks, and hides to the merchant who gave us the quest.

After all that, the five days that the quest was planned to run went smoothly. Sometimes monsters attacked, but everyone dealt with them well. The trio who’d confronted us moved with an understanding of their own strength, and the inattentiveness they’d shown was no more.

The one single thing that I wasn’t thrilled with about the escort quest was the fact that Teto and I couldn’t have ourselves our much-loved baths in a tub she made from the earth and water I heated with magic; instead we had to just use *Clean*. I really ended up thinking that Teto and I were better off traveling just the two of us, instead of in a big group where our conduct was limited.

Chapter 9: The Witch's Party Enters Dungeon City

Having taken on that escort quest, Teto and I stopped in the town right before Dungeon City to report it finished, then headed the rest of the way on foot.

"There really aren't many monsters out here at all. Ah, herb."

"Lady Witch! There's more over here!"

We leisurely made our way along the highway, picking herbs as we passed them. Since the herbs we were used to grew everywhere around here, it was easy. Then, at night, I'd use the ingredients I'd bought in town and spices made with Creation Magic to cook dinner.

"Are you okay with cream turnip stew tonight?"

"Yup! Sticky turnips and thick-cut bacon are delicious!"

"Unfortunately for you, we've got poultry tonight."

"Poultry is also yummy~!"

I cut up the meat we'd gotten from butchering a bird-type monster we'd defeated earlier into bite-size chunks before putting it in the pot. Sometimes we'd dip bread into the cream stew we'd cooked up; other times I'd make rice with Creation Magic and put the stew on it. We just ate it however we were feeling at that moment.

And when the cold, near-winter nights fell—

"Are we ready, Lady Witch?"

"Yep. I've got the blinders ready."

I'd set up some metal poles and put water-repellent fabric on them around the stone bathtub Teto made, making us a simple bath. Then, I put up a barrier spell around all that, getting ready for our first bath in a while.

"Now, I'll get the water ready. *Water, Fireball!*"

I put water in the stone tub, then used *Fireball* magic to heat it up. Then I put dried citrus peels and herbs in the water, making it a medicinal bath.

"Whew, this is really the best way to end the day."

Unlike the hygiene spell *Clean*, which only got rid of dirt, the medicinal bath's scent and effect warmed you to the core.



After Teto and I washed each other's hair and got out of the tub, we gently used the bear-oil salve to protect our skin from drying out in the winter air. The salve, having been filtered a great number of times, didn't smell and was absorbed easily into our skin, letting me get to sleep comfortably in my tent. Teto, who didn't get tired, stayed up on guard duty outside, and our day ended.

Traveling along the highway picking herbs, we made it to the Old Capital of Apanemis, aka Dungeon City, three days later.

"We made it."

"Looks like it, yep."

Going into the city, we got into the adventurers-only line to be processed. Every town had a special entrance for adventurers so as not to get in the way of their duties, so everything going through that entrance went incredibly smoothly. Dungeon City was especially good about it, as its economy was centered around adventurers.

After asking the gatekeeper where the guild was, we headed straight there. It seemed that it was built right beside the dungeon that appeared in the city, and they managed the entrance.

"We'll be holding off on the dungeon for a while so we can gather a bit of information."

"Huuuh? But I want the dungeon's magic stones~!"

"Yeah, yeah. I think you'll find some good practice partners in the guild's training grounds, so put up with that for a bit instead."

"Okaaaay!"

Smiling wryly at Teto's inalienably Teto-like behavior, I headed to the guild's receptionist.

"Hello. We just arrived today, so we came to say hello. These are our guild cards."

"Welcome! I'll just check those for you."

Despite being a suspicious kid with my hood pulled low, I'd learned over the past year that handing over my guild card like that kept problems to a minimum. And, as adventurers D-rank and above could challenge the dungeon, people coming from abroad for that purpose probably wasn't a rare occurrence. Even more adventurers came before winter for the steady earnings they could get from the dungeons, but she was still a little surprised that someone child-sized like me was C-rank.

"Thank you. What are your plans for the time being?"

"We'll be staying in the city for the dungeon over winter. And...an inn would probably cost a lot for that length of time, so we'd like recommendations for housing to rent for a longer period."

Though she was taken aback by my clear, careful answers to her questions, it seemed that the receptionist had decided I must be older

than my appearance, and she pulled out a number of documents.

“Well then! We have a number of rental houses from realtors who work with the guild. Other than that, some former adventurers run apartments for lease.”

From what she told us, it seemed that there was the option to lease an apartment rather than rent a whole house. Teto and I generally only came to our lodgings to sleep and leave our things, so a house would be far too big. An apartment, though only being one room a little bit larger than an inn room, had former adventurers working as landlords, so the security would be flawless.

“Then we’d like to lease an apartment. Would you be able to write us a referral?”

“Of course. Please wait just a moment.”

“Ah, and while we’re waiting, we wanted to turn in materials...”

“If you’d like to do that, then please wait at the counter over there.”

After Teto and I noted where the purchase counter was, we moved there, taking out the medicinal herbs we’d picked along the way.

“We’d like to sell these herbs.”

“Understood. I’ll assess them immediately.”

Since we’d put them in our time-slowng magic bag, they were nice and fresh. In the future, I wanted to grow my mana pool and *Create* a magic bag where time stopped inside—only a dream for now.

While I thought about that as we waited, our referral and material assessment were finished.

“These medicinal herbs were in wonderful condition, so we’ll buy them for six silver. This is your referral for the apartment, and a map to it.”

“Thank you. We’ll head right there.”

Saying that, I brought Teto with me, going from the guild to the apartment. It was two stories, with outside doors to each apartment, really looking the part. We immediately brought our referral to the landlord and leased one out. The rent was two small gold per month, and when we paid eight small gold upfront to cover the four months of winter, they asked our ranks, shocked.

“We’re C-rank. We actually have a question. Is that all right?”

“Yes, of course!”

“It seems that this apartment has a bath. Where might it be?”

“Ah, yeah, we have a bath. It’s out back.”

If we fought with the monsters in the dungeon, their corpses and blood would disappear. All that would be left would be their stones and materials, so it was harder to get dirty there. But adventurers had quests outside the dungeon as well, so there would be times where we’d come back dirty with blood from quests outside of the city. That

was apparently what the bath was for.

“So it’s free for use if we run it ourselves?”

“Yep. As long as you deal with moving the water and paying for the firewood yourself, and clean it once you’re done.”

“Yaaaay! We’ll be able to bathe every day!”

As I tried to hold back a smile at how much Teto had begun to love baths, the two of us headed to our rented room, which was on the corner on the second floor. Inside, I took the well-loved bed that I’d Created on our journey out of my magic bag and set it down in the center of the room. I’d made the bed with my Creation Magic, and it was high quality and more than big enough for Teto and I to sleep in together.

Creating a top quality bed like that took 30,000 MP, which I had to supplement with my stored Mana Crystals. In comparison to the hunk of metal I sliced the hydra up with, a bed took a craftsman’s skills, knowledge, and planning to make, so despite it having less mass, it was the second most mana-intensive thing I’d Created.

I had to smile as Teto dove into the bed, bouncing with the springs. I pulled our cooking tools out of our magic bag and laid them out on the table we were provided. I figured I could amuse myself by making potions with the herbs from my bag when I felt like it.

“Okay, from tomorrow on, I’ll check out the guild’s documents and find information on the dungeon.”

“But first, I’m hungry!”

“Let’s go eat then.”

Teto was kicking up a fuss on the bed, so we headed to the dining hall a bit earlier than planned. There, the food was made from monster materials and spices found in the dungeon, and it was quite delicious. Once we were satisfied, we headed back to our apartment.

And so, our first day in Apanemis the Dungeon City ended.

Chapter 10: Researching in Dungeon City, and the Elf Adventurer Raphilia

From the next morning on, Teto and I began going to the guild. While other adventurers took quests and headed right for the dungeon, I went to the guild's document room, and Teto went to the training grounds.

"Teto never changes."

Despite Teto looking like a cute tanned girl, she was much better at Body Strengthening than she looked. While she more or less held back in order to avoid hurting her opponents, her golem-born instincts to dutifully follow orders made her perfectly happy to take every hit that came her way. While adventurers usually used a bit of mana with their yelling to scare opponents, the fact that Teto didn't even care and just attacked back baffled the adventurers who went up against her.

"Well then. I'll get to researching."

After looking down out of the second-story document room's window at Teto, I started flipping through the books. Since I had the Speed-Reading and Memory Technique skills, that was enough to let me understand the gist of most of the books. Once I finished reading a book, I closed my eyes and spent about ten seconds comparing what I'd just read with books I'd read in the past, finding the contradictions and differences. Depending on the situation, I had to update and edit my knowledge to tell which ones were mistakes in the copying of the book, or differences in what was referenced.

"There's not much helpful info here. For the time being, I'll look at past quest completion reports to study the guild's quest trends."

Though not much was notable, I made a mental note to myself to thoroughly read through the documents on the monsters in the dungeon and what we could collect there, and to buy myself a copy of the guild's archival material to read over.

"I thought there'd be lots of old documents, since it's the Old Capital and all, but there isn't much here."

In comparison to the guilds in other towns, more of the books here were dungeon-related. But their bookplates were all relatively new.

"Ah, so it's because all the important stuff got moved when the capital did, and the rest were lost in fires from the second Dungeon

Stampede.”

As I read through books related to the history of the marquis family that governed the Dungeon City, I was a little bit disappointed that my guess that they’d have documents related to the Wasteland of Nothingness had been wrong.

“Oh, it’s already this late? The sun goes down so soon when it’s this close to winter. I should go get Teto...”

After cleaning up the books in the document room, and popping by the guild’s counter to buy a dungeon monster encyclopedia and one of the public maps they had of the dungeon, I headed to the training grounds to meet Teto.

“Heeey, Lady Witch!”

“Good job, Teto. You look like you’ve still got some fight in you.”

“I can keep going!”

With Teto’s endless stamina, she’d been fighting mock battles with adventurers from dawn to dusk. I looked down at the (near-)corpses of the adventurers who had challenged her, and I asked, “How many did you get today?”

“Um... Three!”

Three being the number of parties that had seen her appearance and skills in the mock battles and tried to have her join them. In the past year, Teto had sparred in the guild training grounds of every town we stopped in, both to sharpen her skills and for fun, and there were always adventurers who would try to force her into their parties.

Since it was a pain for me to go out to deal with them every time it happened, I’d had her answer that she’d only think about joining someone’s party if they could beat her. Because a lot of the adventurers trying to recruit her were muscle heads who took her up on her challenge, she just had to win to shut them up. On the off chance that she lost, I would come down as the other member of her party and talk it out, but up until now, she hadn’t lost even once.

“I see. Good job. Well then—*Clean, Area Heal!*”

Like always, I cast cleaning and healing magic on the pile of collapsed adventurers.

“Thank you for practicing with Teto. Please keep on doing it for a while longer.”

After thanking and healing all of the adventurers in the training grounds, we headed back to our apartment. Then I’d do things like make potions until the dining hall opened for the night.

“Lady Witch, you’re making mana potions?”

“Yep. Apparently, there are traps in the dungeon that sap your mana, so I’ve gotta have some ready.”

“But you have so much mana, and you’ve got tons stored in mana crystals!”

“Yes, but isn’t it much more convenient to have multiple ways to replenish it?”

Even if I used the mana in mana crystals to cast a spell, I couldn’t take the mana from a crystal and absorb it into myself to replenish my stores. And if I got hit by a mana-draining trap and ran out, I’d be too sick to fight. Even if my mana pool was over 15,000, I felt that having ways to replenish my mana in cases like that was necessary.

“I see. Teto heard lots about the dungeons too!”

On her part, it seemed she’d heard stories about the dungeon from the adventurers she’d befriended during her mock battles. Information based on actual experience, the kind that you couldn’t just read in a book, was valuable. But since Teto’s way of speaking was a bit hard to understand, it took a few rounds of patient listening for me to get it.

But oh well. Talking with Teto was fun too.

And so our life in the Dungeon City began. During the days, I’d search the city’s bookstores and libraries for information on the Wasteland of Nothingness and other books that interested me to pore over, while Teto kept on going to the training grounds.

Two weeks came to pass, and Teto and I headed to the guild on that day as well.

“Welcome, Chise, Teto! We’re looking forward to today!”

“Okay! See you later, Lady Witch!”

“Yeah, see you later. I’ll be in the document room.”

As we walked onto the training grounds, a bunch of brawny adventurers were lined up to greet the two of us. Teto had been fighting against adventurers back-to-back, day after day, with her overwhelming toughness. Even the people who’d tried to recruit her in the early days were now like her underlings, be it from her sporty mood and momentum or what.

On the other hand, after dropping Teto off at the training grounds, I continued my quiet, comfy book-reading life. There were a number of books I was reading for the first time, and I was also able to find some magical tomes at a bookstore, so I’d learned more about various magic skills. While Origin Magic was enough for attacking with, information on magic items from different legends and anecdotes was quite useful.

I wondered if I’d be able to make them with Creation Magic if I had enough mana. For example, one thing I’d actually tried making was the curse-returning talisman. It was a consumable tool that stopped magic-sealing curses and other magical curses like brainwashing, charm, and slavery, then cast the same back even stronger. Just making a single one took 30,000 MP, so I’d used the mana I had stored in crystals to make some for Teto and myself.

I also wanted to try clearly imagining the effects those magic tools

had and Creating weapons, armor, and tools that had multiple effects at once. My problem was that the more effects one item had, the higher its mana cost would be, so I currently didn't have the needed mana to *Create* them.

Using the information I gathered during the day, I spent my time in our apartment at night using Creation Magic and Mixology to make tools we'd need for challenging the dungeon.

Seeing as we spent a lot of time getting ready for the dungeon, we stood out in a way and were accepted. Teto and I lived a quiet life, sometimes going out on the town to shop. We spent our time on breaks, hobbies, and preparing for the dungeon, and just as I was thinking it was about time for us to make a go of it, I heard a loud, unfamiliar noise from the training grounds.

"What?! Someone's using magic?!"

Having been reading in the document room as usual, the sounds of destruction and the shaking of the building from the training grounds made me rush to the window. Looking down, I saw thick clouds of dust floating around, and that the training ground's inner wall had been destroyed. On the other side of the grounds was a girl with a bow, probably an adventurer.

"Is that an...elf? And she's using Spirit Magic on her arrows?"

Focusing my mana to my eyes and looking at the elfen girl, I could see wind spirits imbuing mana into her arrows.

Incidentally, while Origin Magic used your own mana to recreate natural phenomena, Spirit Magic let one give their mana to spirits and have them recreate phenomena with higher efficiency. Also, since spirits, who were much better at using mana than humanoid races, were casting the magic, it took less mana while doing higher damage—but I digress.

"I won, so do what you promised and join our party!" announced the elf girl loudly towards Teto, who was getting up out of the rubble.

"Owie, you shouldn't attack in ways that would hurt people when doing mock battles! It's dangerous!"

"What?! You took my special blow?!"

Having guarded with Body Strengthening, Teto was physically uninjured, but her training clothes were shredded.

"I'm glad she isn't hurt. But this looks like trouble, so I should go down."

As I hurried from the document room to the training grounds, Teto's battle with the elf girl continued. But, unlike how Teto usually took her mock battles head-on, this time she was running away from the elf girl's attacks.

"This time, I'll make you admit defeat with my special technique!"

"Stop! I promised Lady Witch that I wouldn't get anyone else hurt!"

And I won't fight someone who doesn't fight safely!"

"Then just admit you've lost and join our party!"

"Nooo~!"



The elf girl kept on chasing Teto, who kept drawing her fire clear of the other adventurers on the training grounds; she was leading the elf girl to the far corner.

“Give it up! Either acknowledge that you lost now, or acknowledge you lose after taking this attack!”

“I don’t want to do either!”

As Teto rebuffed her, the elf girl used Spirit Magic to pour even more mana into her arrows.

“That’s bad! Teto—”

“Raphilia! What the hell are you doing?!”

Just as I tried to stop the fight, a man’s cry drowned out my voice. As it echoed through the training grounds, the elf girl jumped, trembling as she turned around.

“Arsus.”

“What the hell are you doing, bothering other adventurers like that?!”

When the dignified warrior who she’d called Arsus appeared, the other adventurers on the training grounds all tensed up. With him were a man dressed like a scout, a young female mage, and a priest-like man.

“But we need her for our party right now! And she said she’d join our party if I won!”

“Teto only said she’d *think* about it if you won! She never said she would! That’s what Lady Witch told me to do!” Teto cried, interrupting the girl.

The adventurer named Arsus put a hand to his forehead, throwing his head back. “That’s the polite way to turn down a party request, you dumbass! And then you tried to force her?! And dragged other adventurers into it?!” he yelled, scolding the girl who was apparently named Raphilia.

I didn’t like it much when people yelled, since it hurt my head, but I liked the cut of his jib. Teto, judging that the conversation was over, put a hand to the wall she’d got thrown through and used her earth magic to fix it.

“I’m sorry one of our party members bothered you. And you could’ve just left the wall and made her pick up the repair bill.”

“Lady Witch told me I need to clean things up once I’m finished using them. I’m fixing it to how it was, so it doesn’t bother the next people who will fight here,” Teto said with a smile.

Arsus muttered that she was a good kid, while shooting Raphilia a disappointed look. “I’m sorry our dumbass elf bothered you. She’s putting on the years, but it doesn’t do shit for her common sense.”

“Wha?! I’m only sixty-seven! I’m young for an elf!”

“I’m not bothered. It was fun fighting a different kind of mock battle than usual!”

Though the sixty-seven-year-old elf girl objected to her leader’s words, Teto just ignored her with a smile, like an adult.

Arsus moved on to business.

“I’m really sorry about Raphilia trying to force you into our party. Please let me ask you again: would you like to join our party as a tank and keep the monsters off of us?”

He invited her politely this time, but Teto—

“No, I don’t want to leave Lady Witch. Ah, there she is!”

Clearly rejecting the offer, Teto saw that I was there, and ran over to me.

“Good job, Teto. *Clean, Heal.*”

She probably wasn’t hurt anywhere, but I gave her a quick hygiene-and-healing once-over just in case. But magic couldn’t do anything about the tatters her clothes were in, so I took a change of clothes out of my magic bag and handed them to her.

“Go get changed, Teto. I don’t think you’ll be doing any more training today.”

“Okaaay.”

As Teto took the clothes and ran off to the changing rooms, I did my usual rounds of cleaning and healing magic on the adventurers who had fought mock battles with her, before standing in front of the adventurer named Arsus.

“My name’s Arsus. I’m an A-rank adventurer and the leader of the Swords of Daybreak.”

“I’m Chise, the witch. I’m C-rank, and I’m partied with Teto.”

Both of us introduced ourselves as leaders.

“Sorry for trying to poach your party member. We didn’t know. Would you be okay to chat for a bit?”

“I think I would, if you’d treat us to lunch as an apology for troubling us.”

“Got it. Raphilia will foot the whole bill.”

“That’s despotism! DESPOTISM!”

Despite the difference in our ages and heights, it seemed we’d be able to have a good talk without him looking down on us.

Chapter 11: The A-Rank Party, Swords of Daybreak

After a quick run back up to the guild's archive to clean up for me, and a change of clothes for Teto, we sat across from the Swords of Daybreak in the guild pub.

"Excuse me. I'd like this and this from the lunch menu, please!"

"I'll just have the stew set and some juice."

We were getting treated to lunch as Raphilia the elf's punishment for causing a fuss, and Teto was taking full advantage. I tried to keep my own order diplomatic.

And the Swords of Daybreak?

"Yeah, this one was delicious, so I'll get it. Also, beer!"

"I'll get booze too. Also, some finger food."

"Then I'll have this, this, and this. And salad, and wine."

"I'd like food. And water, not liquor."

"WHA?! YOU ASSHOLES, YOU'RE ONLY ORDERING ALL THAT BECAUSE I'M PAYING!"

Arsus and company were also taking full advantage of Raphilia footing the bill. It may have been a show of just what good friends they were, but the elf girl was tearing up.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" I asked first, wanting to get the important talk out of the way while everyone was sober.

Arsus, the leader of the party, answered my question honestly. "We actually just got back from a monster-slaying quest outside of town today, but the quest showed us what our party is missing. Now we're searching for a fifth party member to be our tank and take monsters' attacks head-on."

"Which is why you wanted Teto."

Teto herself had her mouth stuffed full of meat; she tilted her head in confusion when she noticed us looking her way.

"Yep, that's about it. Sorry our rampaging elf bothered you too. We've completely given up on Teto now. Wouldn't wanna damage our rep by ripping two friendly party members apart."

"That's wise. Teto would absolutely never leave me, and I wouldn't let her go either."

I stared at him from under my hood as I said it, and Arsus gave me a wry smile back. The elf girl was puffing her cheeks out crankily, seemingly not liking her party leader's decision.

“How can you act like that when an *A-rank party* is scouting you out?”

“Show some remorse, dumbass.”

“Owww! Mean! You didn’t have to hit me!”

Thinking that they’d gone back to their antics, I quietly ate my lunch, paying them next to no attention. Apparently, everyone but Arsus was actually B-rank.

“So? Do you have any other candidates for a tank?”

“Nope. We’ll have to keep looking. Worst-case scenario, we’ll find a D-rank who looks like they’d be good and power-level ’em,” Arsus said, looking towards Lena the witch and Raphilia the elf. It seemed they were the party’s main ranged DPS. The priest-looking guy was probably the designated healer—though he looked like he could hold his own with that mace if he wanted—while their scout-looking guy seemed like he did crowd control and bought time for the party.

Their current party balance wasn’t bad, but Arsus the A-rank was pulling double duty by acting as a tank too. If they had a proper dedicated tank so he could fight at full power instead, they’d deal even more damage.

But anyway—

“I’m jealous...” I murmured, staring down at my completely flat chest as I wondered how two witches could have such a difference in breast size. Lena had an adult allure, and the low-cut black mermaid dress and cape she was wearing suited her. “...I wanna get big too.”

“You’re the perfect size already, Lady Witch. Perfect to hug.”

“Yes, Chise, was it? You’ll grow soon enough.”

Teto patted my head, while Lena the young witch smiled amusedly.

But there was one person displeased with our conversation.

“Hmph. You must’ve leached off of Teto to get your rank,” Raphilia quipped like a poor loser.

The smile instantly dropped from Teto’s face; she looked ready to kill.

“How dare you—?!”

“Stop, Teto!”

“Kay.”

Teto wilted as I ordered her to stop, but Arsus and the rest of the party had reflexively grabbed their weapons in response to Teto’s bloodlust, ready for battle. As I internally admired how fast high-ranking adventurers reacted, I let my depressed former golem hug me until she calmed down.

“Raphilia. You might be strong, being B-rank, but your observation skills are abysmal. Worse than a D-rank. Little Chise there might be holding back her mana, but she’s strong enough to be a court

magician.”

The court magicians who served the country were the strongest of the mages who represented a country. They defeated monsters to level up and devoted their lives to the study of magic, and while their mana pools varied vastly, the absolute minimum was 10,000. The ones with the highest were said to have somewhere from 30,000 to 40,000 MP.

While I'd been suppressing my mana output to hide my total mana pool, it seemed high-ranking adventurers could see right through me.

“You're right. My current total is around 15,000 MP.”

“Amazing!” said Lena, the other witch. “If you have that much mana at your age, you'll probably keep on gaining more! I have 12,000 MP. Our priest over there has 7,000. Raphilia, by the way, has just around the same as you at 15,000 MP, since she's an elf.”

“Hey, don't tell people my mana pool size! And I'm still growing too! Mine'll get bigger too!!!”

“Hey, so your mana pool is amazing, but what kinds of magic can you use?” Lena asked. “I saw you use *Clean* and *Heal* at the training grounds, so water and light? I'm best at fire and dark.”

“I use wind magic most of the time. I prefer it to fire magic, since it doesn't damage the goods or spread around. Ah, and I use barrier magic a lot too, since we travel.”

“I see. Wind magic is the best thing to use when gathering materials. And since you're two girls alone, barrier magic is a must!”

Since we were both mages, we actually hit it off pretty well.

And so, after we built a bit of rapport with the higher-ranked adventurers, Teto and I finished our food and stood from the table.

“We'll be heading home now. We're planning on starting our dungeon run tomorrow.”

“I see. Sorry for all the trouble! If we meet down in the dungeon, we should work together!”

After we'd said farewell to Arsus and his party, we left the guild and headed back to our apartment. Then, that night after we finished dinner and were about to go use the building's bath, we ended up running into them on their way home. It seemed they were also leasing an apartment, meaning we'd had our first run-in with a neighbor.

Chapter 12: Our First Dungeon Run in Ages

We were going to make our first attempts at the Old Capital Apanemis's dungeon.

"We have our map, our gear, our consumables... Are we missing anything?"

"We're all good!"

"Then let's take the shortest route down to the tenth floor. After that, we can just go with the flow."

And so, after greeting the door guard, we challenged the dungeon.

While only adventurers D-rank and up were allowed in the dungeon, it actually took until the fifth floor for any D-rank monsters to show up. The first and second floors had trash mobs that even children could beat.

We kept an eye on our map as Teto one-shot all the monsters, putting the item drops and magic stones in our magic bag.

"I'd heard about it, but this plains-type dungeon is really weird."

The dungeon we'd beaten last time was an undiscovered cave-type dungeon. It had been small at only five floors, but this dungeon was apparently fairly large. While the current floor looked like plains and blue skies as far as the eye could see, you could actually only go so far, unlocking more each floor.

"Makes it really easy to explore. Let's keep on going."

Following our map, we took the quickest route to the fifth floor, facing off against the monsters called gatekeepers who blocked the path forward every five floors. They were stronger than any other monster on the level, and appeared as a group of lizardmen, just as we'd heard.

"I'll go first, Lady Witch!"

"Do your best. I'll go with the flow—*Wind Cutter!*"

Though it was a pain dealing with a coordinated group, Teto and I one-shot them all one by one, defeating them quickly. If I'd been serious about it, I could have used AOE magic to chop them all into bits in an instant.

"All together, they were still weaker than that Stone Golem. Granted, the dungeon core there had a spirit in it, so it was probably higher-ranked."

Though I hadn't known it at the time, my subsequent research had

taught me that when dungeon cores absorbed other beings by chance, the being's nature had a strong effect on the dungeon, making it more dangerous. They might have been bosses on the same floor number, but by being stronger, it put the dungeon on a different level. While I was absorbed in that line of thought, we descended to the sixth floor. Though the fake sun in the plains dungeon's sky moved just like the real thing, letting you know approximately what time it was, I sometimes stopped and pulled out a pocket watch I'd created to make sure.

"It'll be time for lunch soon. Once we get to this floor's safe zone, we should eat."

"Good idea!"

As Teto and I chatted like we always did, we followed the map to the watering hole safe zone. There, the other adventurers who'd beaten the fifth floor's gatekeeper took a rest.

In dungeons that had more than five floors, the level after a gatekeeper always had a teleportation circle in its safe zone. Once you touched that circle, you could travel back and forth between it and the teleportation circle at the dungeon's entrance.

After giving the other adventurers a nod, Teto and I touched the teleportation circle to register with it before eating a distance away. Then we kept going for the afternoon.

"Next goal is the tenth floor."

"Roger!" Teto said, saluting. I giggled at her before putting my thoughts back to business.



I focused mana into my eyes and ears, using wind and earth magic to sense around me. Staying on guard against the monsters around us, we followed the shortest path possible from the map we'd bought at the guild. Since Teto could still one-shot all of the monsters on these levels with a swing of her magic sword, we progressed quickly. Then, after passing by adventurers who were headed back to the sixth floor's teleportation circle after their hunt, we challenged the tenth floor's gatekeeper.

"Ogres, huh? Let me do it this time."

"Got it!"

Teto pulled back, and I flew up into the air to overlook the three ogres.

A year earlier, I would have barely been able to scratch their skin with my *Wind Cutter*, but things were different now.

"*Laser!*"

Pointing my staff at the ogres, I let loose a focused beam of light. It went right through one ogre's heart, burning a round hole right through its chest.

"Next—a sweeping *Laser!*"

Despite being burnt around its heart, the ogre's wound had ended up cauterized, and it still had enough life in it to take another step towards us. The next minute, another beam of light moved with the tip of my staff, sweeping horizontally across the throats of the ogres. All three ogres' heads fell to the floor.

"Well, that's good enough. I'm not quite sure how well it'd work against monsters with resistances against heat or magic, but it might've been a little bit too strong in this situation."

Though it'd be easy to see at night thanks to using light, it was a deadly silent and penetrating spell. The major problem was how it was a straight beam of light, so it didn't really follow the caster's will, making any accidental friendly fire deadly.

"Since it's *too* deadly, maybe it'd be better to use something that creates metal and shoots it like *Metal Bullet*, or a compressed blade of water like *Water Cutter*, or an exploding spear of fire like *Burst Lance*..."

In the first place, I probably could have just put even more mana into a *Wind Cutter* to make it sharper. Or if cutting was my only aim, I could use the space component of dark magic to just shift the area between a target's head and body... Wait.

"No, no. My magic ideas are just getting more violent. Let's just go register with the eleventh floor's teleportation circle and head home for the day."

"Okay!"

And so, after touching the circle on the eleventh floor, we left the dungeon and headed to the guild.

“Oh, hey, Chise. Teto. You went to the dungeon today, right? How’d it go?”

There, we ran into Arsus and his gang, who’d come back at about the same time.

“We got past the tenth floor as a warm-up and came back.”

“Pushing yourself? Do your best not to die. We’re on the twenty-fourth floor now, by the way!”

The map that you could buy at the guild only showed up to the twentieth floor. If they were even further, that’d make them the top adventurers in town.

“We’re just going to go through it little by little. See you all, then.”

“Good night~!”

After selling some of the dropped materials and magic stones we’d picked up at the desk, we left the guild. In Dungeon City, the rank of the item drops you got from the dungeon counted towards your contributions to the guild.

“We’ll be staying here for the winter, so let’s do things at our own pace.”

“Going at our own pace is the best!”

“Our pace” was probably unbelievably fast to a normal person, though. But we weren’t pushing ourselves that hard, so it should have been fine.

Thinking to myself as we walked back to our apartment, I looked up into the sky, only to see snow falling lightly from the thick clouds. And so, on the day of Dungeon City Apanemis’s first snowfall, we were able to get to the eleventh floor of the dungeon.

Chapter 13: Our First Dungeon Treasure Chest in a While. Inside Was...

The day after the first snowfall of the year, though you could see traces of the snow around town, the temperature inside the dungeon was completely normal.

From the eleventh floor on, the dungeon became a forest, and we fought even stronger enemies as we resumed our dungeon run. As the trees got in the way of my magic more than the clear plains, it was much more efficient to have Teto approach monsters and just slash them. Most of the monsters still fell in just one hit.

“Hmm... Since we’re in a wooded area now, I wonder if there’s a more efficient spell I could use...”

I was afraid of fire magic lighting the whole place up, but wind and water magic wasn’t the best. Light magic did *too much* damage, and I’d be overlapping elements with Teto if I used earth magic. Dark magic let me control matter with psychokinesis, mess with weight, or solidify shadows into weapons with my mana, but it did less damage than *Wind Cutter*. It was great against spirit enemies, though.

“Wind, wind... Sharp whirlwinds, gusts, hurricanes... Ah, lightning!”

If I used lightning magic, an offshoot of wind magic, I might be able to change up the power enough for it to be useful.

“Okay. How about—*Thunder Bolt!*”

When I used about 1,000 MP in the cast, the bolt of lightning that descended hit a nearby tree and split it clean in two to the roots.

“Hrmmm... That was too strong. What if I make it weaker...?”

After changing the power level back and forth, I settled on a 100 MP arrow of lightning, *Thunder Arrow*. It proved consistently able to pick off D-rank trash mobs. And, since it would only char the area the arrow hit on a monster’s body, it could even be used outside the dungeon to get materials from monsters. Unlike wind blades, which shot fairly straight, I could move the arrow around, and because I could weave it between the trees, it was accurate.

“If I lowered the damage even more, it could be used to capture humans. Dungeons are great, since they never run out of monsters for me to practice on.”

Saying that, we blithely pushed on through the forest dungeon, challenging the fifteenth floor's gatekeeper.

I shot off ten lightning arrows, hitting it straight on. The monster barely managed to soak it with its magic resistance, and while the shock slowed its movements, Teto moved in with her sword.

For an instant, I worried about whether Teto would get shocked too by hitting a monster that was still electrically charged. Blessedly, her old golem immunities still held.

From the sixteenth floor on, though the floors still looked like forests, they grew in size.

"We're getting to the point where the map will be getting less accurate."

"What do you want to do, Lady Witch?"

"Hmm... For now, let's get to the safe zone nearby and its watering hole, hit the teleportation circle, and then head home."

We'd probably have to slow down our exploring a bit from tomorrow on.

We returned home from the dungeon, and the next day, we resumed our run prepared to stay the night.

"There are tons of herbs, mushrooms, and other food in the forest areas, huh?"

Going on from the sixteenth floor, we couldn't just take the shortest route to the next one. We'd need to go to specific places, defeat the right monster there, and collect the dungeon-exclusive items they dropped before the path to our next stop would open. Because of that, we went searching for the monsters indicated on the map.

"As long as we watch out for the problems with line of sight here and keep our eyes peeled for ambushes, the monsters aren't much stronger than they were before. Ah, herb."

Since we were walking around the dungeon a lot more, I started collecting medicinal herbs I saw along the way, only for a pack of gray wolves to appear. Apparently, their leader had the item we needed to progress to the next floor, but with it in a big group like this, I couldn't tell which one was the leader.

"I'll leave this to you, Teto."

"Okay!"

I flew into the air, watching Teto fight from afar. When she cut down a wolf, another would use that instant to attack her from a blind spot. But Teto spun around, hitting them with a backhand blow while catching two more gray wolves with a roundhouse kick. As she continued to mow them down with her swordsmanship and martial arts, it only took a few minutes for the entire pack to end up as corpses, changing into item drops.

“Whew. Collecting this all is gonna be a pain. I should think up a spell just for this. Hmm, suction wouldn’t be quite right. Picking up... Magnetism... *Apport*.”

The spell drew all of the dropped items towards my palm. It was a handy little tool, but my palm was too small to hold everything, so it all just fell to the floor, meaning Teto and I still had to pick it all up manually.

Our exploration of the dungeon continued like that, and we went from the sixteenth floor to the seventeenth.

“It seems like once we’ve cleared a floor once, we can pass through it fine from then on.”

“What should we do, Lady Witch? Keep going?”

“I’m thinking we should camp in the dungeon tonight.”

The last dungeon we’d cleared had been a cave-type one, and since the safe areas were surrounded by walls, the only direction we had to watch out for was the entrance. But this time, other adventurers were there too, and since the dungeon was pretty open concept, we had to be more watchful for abnormalities.

“Okay, let’s have dinner.”

“I wanna eat meat!”

“Ah, now that you mention it, some good meat dropped for us, didn’t it?”

Around the time we hit the forest levels, we ran into a boar monster—a horn boar. It was a rank down from the bighorn boar we defeated during our escort quest. After defeating it, it dropped a magic stone and something akin to sirloin.

“Hmm... Maybe pork sauté?”

Also known as: pork steak.

I put some of the vegetable oil I’d conjured in my frying pan, cut the veggies I pulled from my magic bag, and stir-fried them in the oil until they were soft before putting them on a plate. Then I put a thick, salted and peppered cut of horn boar meat that was sliced along the grain into the still oily frying pan, using some garlic soy steak sauce (wholesale) I’d also conjured on it once it was nicely cooked. Once it was finished, I laid out the pork sauté on the stir-fried veggies, which soaked up the fat and sauce.

“Our pork sauté is done. We also have some bread and instant corn soup.”

“It looks delicious. Thanks for the grub!”

We put a tablecloth over the stone table Teto made, setting the food on top. It was a pretty serious meal to eat inside a dungeon, but the thick pork sauté with its mouthwatering garlic soy steak sauce scent was ridiculously delicious.

“But it isn’t good for a girl to smell like garlic, huh...? Would

Clean get rid of it? Ah, it did.”

“Lady Wiiiitch, the bath is ready!”

Teto manipulated the dungeon floor to make a bathtub, and I used magic to heat up the water. Then, we got in together. We were way too comfortable for a camping trip.

That night, Teto kept watch while I slept inside the tent, and morning came without any problems.

“Good morning, Teto.”

“Good morning, Lady Witch! Let’s do our best today too!”

After exchanging morning greetings with Teto, eating breakfast, and finishing getting ready, we resumed our dungeon run. We’d got a handle on the floor gimmicks after yesterday, so we finished them quickly. But since the materials you could find in the forest area were for some quest turn-ins, we explored a bit to collect some.

“Ah, a treasure chest.”

“Did someone miss it?”

“Probably not. It might’ve just spawned.”

Dungeons would periodically spawn treasure chests as bait to draw in raiders. Inside of those chests were things like money or rare magic items like magic bags.

We carefully walked closer to the chest we found. Then, after casting a barrier on her to protect her, I had Teto open the treasure chest.

—*Shwoo, pshhhh*—

“Wah! That scared me!”

“Poison dart and gas traps, huh? I’m glad I put a barrier up for you.”

Though she looked human, Teto’s body was actually made of mud. Thanks to that, she was immune to poisons that had an effect on people, and would be fine even if she was pierced somewhere that was vital to a human.

“Lady Wiiiitch~ look at this treasure!”

“Wait, Teto, don’t touch it! I’ll appraise it first... Ah.”

Teto had pulled a gauntlet and a necklace from the chest. Out of the two treasures, the necklace gave off a mysterious sparkle before trying to coil around Teto’s neck. Just as it slipped out of her hand to her neck, it seemed to be repelled by something and fell to the ground.

“Hwah, that scared me too~!”

“T-Teto, are you okay?!”

I quickly ran up to her, checking for any injuries. Then I took out our appraising monocle and looked at the necklace that had tried to wrap around her neck.

As I’d thought, it was a necklace of strangulation. It had originally

been a magical necklace, but the dungeon's mana had cursed it. It would move on its own to strangle anyone who touched it.

Teto, as a former golem, was strong against physical status effects. But her mental resistance to things like curses was just normal human.

"Aaah! The charm Lady Witch gave me is falling apart!"

"So the curse-returning talisman protected you."

Since it was a consumable item, the talisman that she'd hidden under her clothing was in pieces, as if it had been burned.

"Teto, here's a replacement curse-returning talisman. And since it'd be dangerous to leave a cursed item like that as is, can you make a stone box to put it in?"

"Okay."

After giving Teto a new curse-returning talisman, I used my dark magic *Psychokinesis* to pick up the necklace of strangulation and wrap it in cloth that I'd made with Creation Magic. As long as no one touched it directly, it should have been fine. But just in case, we put the cloth-wrapped necklace in the stone box Teto had created, then tied it up tightly with rope before putting it in our Magic Bag.

"It should be okay now. As for the gauntlet... Ah, this is pretty nice."

Another round of appraisal revealed it was a gauntlet of the earth—exactly what it said on the tin, really. It made anything held by its wearer feel lighter. Apparently, it halved the perceived weight of whatever its wearer held.

"This looks like it'd be good for a warrior. And the effect is constant. Want it, Teto?"

"No, I don't need it."

Teto's physical strength as a golem and the Body Strengthening she used with her astonishing mana pool let her easily throw people. It seemed she wasn't interested in something that'd make things a little bit lighter than they already were at this point.

She also had a very Teto-like reason for not wanting it.

"If I had that equipped, you'd feel all the hard bits when I hugged you, Lady Witch."

"That's why you don't want it? Ah, well. It's too big for me, so let's sell it."

While it was something that adventurers with an affection for heavy melee weapons would drool over, it was useless for us. But now that I knew there were magic tools like this, I'd be able to use a ton of mana to make one with my Creation Magic.

"Okay. Now we can move on."

Since we'd done enough gathering, we descended to the eighteenth floor. We reached the eighteenth floor's safe zone that day, camped for a night, then went through both the eighteenth and

nineteenth floors to reach the twentieth floor the next day.

“Once we’re through here, we’ll be able to go back home with the twenty-first floor’s teleportation circle.”

“Just a little more! I wanna go home quick so I can sleep with Lady Witch in our bed!”

Since I’d had Teto taking the night watch all night while camping in the dungeon, I was also looking forward to having a nice rest with her. But first, we had to deal with the B-rank land dragon waiting for us at the twentieth floor’s gate.

Normally, a group of C-ranked adventurers would need to stall it while DPSing it from afar with magic, but—

“Teto!”

“Roger!”

Teto didn’t protect me, the mage, instead charging in and slicing off the land dragon’s leg with her magic sword. Then, I flew up into the air and—

“I wonder how it’ll work on a dragon—*Thunderbolt!*”

The land dragon’s roar echoed in the wake of the lightning bolt that I’d dropped on it. But, fittingly for a dragon, it still had enough health left to fight on a little longer.

“One more—*Thunderbolt!*”

I spent another 1000 MP to drop another bolt of lightning on it. While it was strong enough to need two casts, it didn’t have any regenerative powers like a hydra, so it was easy to beat.

After that, the charred land dragon corpse disappeared, leaving a magic stone worthy of a B-rank monster and a little bottle filled with a dark red liquid.

“This must be land dragon blood, huh?”

Dragon blood was mostly used in the creation of various magical medicines, so it sold for a pretty penny. Despite the fact that a land dragon was a low-intelligence variant on the same level as a wyvern, its blood was still strong. But its blood should’ve boiled after getting burnt to a crisp using lightning magic, so how did fresh blood drop? And in a bottle, at that...

“I should stop thinking about it. It’s just one of those things. Let’s head to the twenty-first floor’s circle, register with it, and head home.”

“I agree! I want to eat at that one place nearby!”

Teto and I headed to the twenty-first floor. There, the appearance of the zones changed to caves like we were used to from the last one we were in. Arsus and his party, the top adventurers in the city, were probably on a floor around here.

“For now, since we don’t have a map of this part, let’s do a bit of mapping as we search for the safe zone.”

“Got it.”

I had Teto take the lead as we walked through the caves, and I drew up a map as we went. The cave path was comparatively wide, and since the area itself was at least as big as the twentieth floor, it would be a lot harder to map than the first dungeon we'd run. But still, we managed to find the floor's watering hole and safe zone before sunset, and after registering with the teleportation circle, we left the dungeon.

"Hrm... We're tired, and if we go report to the guild now, we'll miss out on dinner. Let's do it tomorrow."

"Teto is starving!"

After leaving the dungeon, we didn't have anything that we needed to rush to report or turn in, so we left going to the guild for the next day. After going to a nearby restaurant and eating dinner, we returned to our apartment, and I was able to sleep in Teto's arms for the first time in days.

Chapter 14: One Act, Turning In Goods at the Guild

The next morning, after slipping out of Teto's hug like usual, I got ready.

"Teto, wake up. We're going to the guild."

"Okaaay~..."

Teto took her precious time getting up, and after eating breakfast at our usual spot, we headed to the guild. Since we'd spent a few days inside the dungeon, we were planning on taking it easy for the day after reporting our progress and turning in our materials.

"Good morning. Can we give you our report?"

"Ah, Chise, Teto, welcome back. Are you on your way back from the dungeon?"

"No, we came back last evening, so we left the report for today."

Since we'd avoided the guild's busiest time first thing in the morning, the guild was a bit empty, and we had lots of time to give our report to the receptionist.

"Yesterday, we got to the twenty-first floor."

"R-really?! You beat the land dragon, just the two of you?!"

"Yes. As proof, we'd like for you to check the magic stone and this land dragon blood."

I pulled the magic stone and the bottle of dragon blood out of my magic bag, putting it in front of the shocked receptionist.

"Wh-What will you be doing with this? We would buy it from you here..."

She gave me a look that screamed, "Sell it to us!" But I looked over to Teto.

"What do you want to do, Teto?"

"Hmm... I want to keep the magic stone."

Yeah, I thought she'd need it to eat. But since it was a bit big to eat in one bite, she'd probably need to smash it into smaller pieces to eat it.

"Okay. And I'd like to keep the blood for my own hobbies, so we won't be selling any of these today."

"Ahh, the stone would've gone for five small gold, and the blood for three small gold too..."

I heard the receptionist's whispering, but it was pretty damn good that we would've got eight small golds—roughly 800,000 yen—from

killing a single land dragon.

“Oh, don’t be too disappointed. We picked up other gathering quest materials.”

“An angel! A gathering goddess of salvation from the nagging quest-givers!”

“Lady Witch is cute as an angel, and as kind as a goddess!”

“Don’t tease her, Teto. And you need to do your job properly!”

I urged the receptionist to bring us over to the sales counter and took out all of the materials we’d gathered from between the sixteenth and twentieth floor.

“We mostly gathered things that there were harvesting requests for, but we also picked up some other stuff that looked useful, so we’d like to sell it. Ah, but give me back half of those herbs. I want to use them myself.”

“Um, Chise, you aren’t planning to do any questionable ritual magic with the land dragon blood and these weird plants, are you?”

Said weird plant was a screeching monster called a mandragora, which was both a requested material and something that needed to be slain. Other than that, there were a few varieties of poisonous-looking mushrooms and oddly colored herbs, which I put back in my magic bag as I answered the receptionist’s question with a look.

“Of course not. I’m going to use these in magical medicines.”

“I-I see. Magical medicines... You mean you can make potions, Chise?”

“Basic ones, yes.”

“Then if you make any, please bring them to the guild! We’ll buy them for two silver each!”

Most of the time, potions sold for around three silvers, so it wasn’t a bad offer, but...

“Is that really okay? Wouldn’t you need to get permission from the guilds that manage medicines?”

They usually turned a blind eye to it in smaller villages, and making them for yourself wasn’t a problem. But in bigger towns, and with potions that other people would be using, they’d probably need to have someone managing them in each region.

While I was thinking that, she explained.

“Since we have a dungeon, the demand for potions is high, and we never have enough. That’s why we’ve been endorsing new mixologists and herb-gathering quests, but it just isn’t going well.”

I nodded in understanding, only for the employee at the sales counter to give the receptionist a warning.

“Stop with the idle chatter.”

“S-sorry. I’ll go assess these materials. Please wait just a moment.”

When she said that, I remembered something. I stopped her before

she could go back to her receptionist duties.

“Wait. I have something else.”

“...What is it this time?”

The receptionist was on guard for what else we’d pull out now. I just ignored the look and continued.

“We found a treasure chest in the dungeon, and it had two magic items inside.”

“Ooh, congratulations.”

“We’d like to sell one of them. It’s something called a gauntlet of the earth.”

When those words left my mouth, all of the adventurers at the guild’s tavern turned to us at once, with a few standing right up.

“Th-That’s... Really, congratulations!”

The receptionist’s face twitched as she congratulated us after seeing the other adventurers’ reactions. I glanced over towards them, and saw that the frontline C-rank adventures were the ones reacting to the name of the item.

The gauntlet of the earth only altered the *perceived* weight of an item in the wearer’s hands. It didn’t actually change it. But if they felt like the sword they were holding was lighter, they’d be able to swing it faster, hitting more often. Another thing they could do was use an even heavier sword, hitting harder. When I actually pulled that drool-worthy item out of my Magic Bag, it started a commotion through the whole guild.

“...I’d like to sell it, but how much would it go for?”

The receptionist looked towards the sales counter employee for help. They gave a troubled smile back before answering in a loud voice that echoed through the guild.

“Items like that sell for different prices each season, and if it’s from a dungeon, it would sell for a lot due to its wonderful ability. It would probably go for around two small golds, at a minimum.”

“Less than I expected,” I quipped, thinking about how it would raise a frontline adventurer’s attack power.

The sales employee gave me a bright smile before answering.

“While it’s true that it would make its user’s weapon feel lighter, and as such provide a potent boost to a frontline fighter, it’s a support item rather than something that directly raises their attack power like a magic sword. I hope you understand.”

“I see. Then what about at an auction?”

“It would go for even more, since people other than adventurers, like nobles and knights, would be participating. But in that case, you wouldn’t get paid immediately, and auction fees would be deducted.”

I understood that for the guild, they’d be selling magical tools that had been sold to them to adventurers looking for a leg up, while you

would auction it off for a higher price to make more of a profit.

“Then we’d like to sell it now.”

“Understood. Will you be keeping the other item you found in the treasure chest for yourself instead of selling it?” asked the receptionist, having almost forgotten about the other magic item with how much impact the reaction to the gauntlet of the earth had.

“That’s my main question. We wanted to know how to deal with cursed gear.”

“Cursed gear... Specifically?”

“A necklace that wraps around your neck and tries to strangle you if you touch it.”

“Like this!” Teto said, miming herself being strangled.

The receptionist let out a little shriek at our words.

“The curse doesn’t activate unless you touch it directly, and if you have something that resists curses equipped, it will repel it. And we have it wrapped in fabric and closed in a stone box for safekeeping.”

I could think of a ton of awful ways to use it, like slipping it in with birthday presents for a noble to assassinate them or something. But it was probably for the greater good to figure out how to cleanse the curse.

“I see. If you had it purified at a church, you could sell it as a magic tool. Our guild could buy it from you, but since we don’t know what exactly it is, it would sell for an even four silver.”

The donation—or rather, price—for having a church purify it was three small gold, so there was a chance we could end up in the red. But if we risked having some random mage purify it for us, they might not be able to break the curse or only partially purify it, and we’d hurt ourselves using it.

“For now, we’d like to go to the church to have them purify it for us.”

“Understood. I’ll mark down church affiliates on a map for you.”

And so, after taking the map from her, we waited a while for them to buy our materials. From the sales and gathering quest rewards combined, we made four small golds, which was a bit of pocket change. The majority of it came from the magic item we sold, since the materials went rather cheaply for the difficulties of the floors we gathered them on, but it was enough for us. While we could’ve made more than one large gold if we’d sold the magic stone too, we kept for the sake of Teto’s appetite.

“We’ll use our profits to get the curse broken, and for our living expenses for a while.”

“Understood. Please show me your guild cards, so I can add your quest completions.”

Teto and I both had them added to our cards.

“It really is amazing. You’ve risen to C-rank in just a year, with a one hundred percent quest completion rate.”

“We only do things we know we can do. And out of everything, we prefer gathering quests that we can take after actually gathering the materials.”

We weren’t adventuring for the sake of completing quests in the first place, so we picked them based on their outcomes.

“We’ll be off, then.”

“We’ll be back later! Bye-bye!”

After getting our accounts squared off with our dungeon accomplishments from up to the day before, we left the guild. After that, we looked at the map of church institutions we’d been given, and chose to head to the one closest to the guild.

Chapter 15: The Church's Purification Magic

“So this is the church, huh?”

Though it looked quite simple, its walls were thickly built, and it had a garden. It may have been built to act as an emergency shelter or temporary hospital.

Entering the building, I saw a statue that resembled the goddess Liriel, who had reincarnated me.

The goddess Liriel was one the Five Great Goddesses, and had the qualities of an earth mother and harvest goddess. Both her name and the little details matched with the goddess who reincarnated me, and she was said to have come down to the surface world in the past to use her powers, bring about miracles through the prayers of the people, or incarnate within a human.



While I was looking up at the statue, a near-elderly priest came to greet us from farther in. Unlike the priestlike adventurer in Arsus's party, he had a gentle expression that really suited a man in his position.

"Oh my, visitors? Welcome."

"Hello, I'm Chise, an adventurer. This is Teto, the other member of my party."

"Nice to meet you!"

Teto's cheerful voice echoed through the solemn-feeling church, and the priest gave her a warm look.

"Chise and Teto. How might I help you today?"

"We've come because we found a piece of cursed equipment while we were exploring the dungeon."

"I see. Then let's discuss things in the room over there."

After being led to the parlor by the priest, we gave him the same explanation we'd given the guild. Then we took the sealed stone box containing the cursed necklace out of my magic bag.

"It's inside here."

"I see... It's comparatively mundane for a piece of cursed equipment. So what would you like to do with it? Carrying cursed objects such as this tends to bring misfortune. Our church could dispose of it for you..."

"We'd like to have it purified here, if possible," I said, putting the three small gold that purification would cost us out on the table.

The priest nodded. "Understood. Let me begin." After taking the lid off of the stone box, he began setting the other tools necessary for the ritual out on the table. "*O Lady, with my mana, I beseech you to purify the world's corruption.* Purification."

Though I wasn't much for god-bothering, I was able to understand the gist of how the purification worked by concentrating mana in my eyes. He was using his own mana to interfere with and untangle the black mana—let's call it miasma for now—emanating from the cursed necklace, changing it into something harmless. Each bit of miasma loosened became mana of various colors, dissolving and disappearing into the air.

I've got the image. Purification disintegrates the target's mana; it's not remotely like how Clean disintegrates dirt.

While I was thinking all that, the priest finished the purification and picked the necklace up, nodding. "The ritual was successful. I'll return this to you."

"Thank you very much. May I check it?"

"Of course. Here you are."

I pulled out my appraising monocle, checking the necklace out.

“Thank you. It looks like the curse is gone completely.”

“I see. May I ask what sort of magic tool it is, for future reference?”

“It’s called a danger-detecting necklace. It lights up red when danger is approaching.”

While it would be a handy tool, it was a bit too gaudy for me, since I looked like a little girl. Since we were done with it, I gently wrapped it back up in fabric before putting it back in my magic bag. Then, the priest led us back out to the entrance.

But a little boy was lying in wait for us there.

“Father, is it true that adventurers came?!”

“Oh, Dan. What are you doing?”

As the priest spoke to the boy in a softly scolding tone, the boy lifted his face and looked straight back at him. “Father, are these the adventurers?”

“Yes, they are. They had some business, but they’re on their way out.”

“Then, miss! Please, take me to the dungeon with you, just like you did with that little kid there!”

Teto looked older, so it seemed he thought I was just a kid with her. It was true that since I was smaller than her, people took her to be the party’s leader, with a good number of them thinking I was just leeching off of her. But I was a full-fledged C-rank adventurer too!

While I was thinking to myself that I should pick up some Illusion Magic to make myself look the same age as Teto, the priest kindly stopped him.

“You mustn’t bother the adventurers. And regardless, it’s dangerous work; children are forbidden from setting foot in the dungeon.”

“Why?! I can’t earn money if I can’t go dungeon-diving!”

“As father to all of the children here, I cannot allow you to do something so dangerous.”

After getting a stern talking-to from the priest, the little boy looked frustrated and sad before running to the back of the church. The priest watched him go, heaving a sigh before apologizing to us.

“I apologize for the trouble.”

“Teto doesn’t mind!”

“Who was that boy?”

Though he hadn’t bothered either of us, I was curious about the priest’s relation to the child.

“He’s one of the children from the orphanage I manage in the back.”

“I see. He seemed to be concerned about money. Are times rough?”

“Though we get by with help from the lord of the region and our believers, I must admit...I fear for the children’s futures.”

“I see...”

I understood that the priest was doing his best. But if one of the children in his care was talking about earning money themselves, the orphanage must have been in dire straits.

“Teto, it’s better to be a hypocrite than to do nothing at all, right?”

“Do whatever you want, Lady Witch. You aren’t wrong.”

“Thank you, Teto... Father.”

When I spoke to him, the priest, who’d become a bit fainthearted when speaking about the orphanage, raised his head and put on his gentle look once again.

“We haven’t got much on hand, but please use this money and this food for the orphanage.”

“Is that really all right?”

I pulled out the one small gold we had left from what we’d sold earlier, and some of the foodstuffs we’d been hoarding. I didn’t know how many orphans there were, or if it would be enough. But I wanted to do *something*.

“Thank you so much. May the goddess Liriel protect the both of you.”

“We’ll be going now.”

“We’ll come back if we need anything!”

Seen off by the priest, Teto and I left the church and returned to our apartment.

Though we’d used most of what we’d earned the past few days at the church, I had no regrets when I thought of it going to the orphans. My day ended with the positive thought that we could always just earn more.

Chapter 16: Danny-Boy

Having used most of the money we'd earned from dungeon-diving on getting the cursed necklace purified and our donation to the orphanage, Teto and I were looking up at the guild's quest board.

"There are no quests for gathering materials in the forest areas, since we did them all. What do you want to do?"

"I want food. And to relax."

"Okay. Then let's kill some monsters in the forest areas who drop ingredients, and then go collect herbs on the plains levels."

We still had money in the guild bank, but we still headed to the dungeon with the feeling that we should keep earning money anyway.

As we approached the dungeon entrance beside the guild, I heard a familiar voice. One that I'd heard the day before.

"Hey, take me into the dungeon with you!"

"Stop bothering us! You'll just get in our way!"

"I might look young, but I'm actually F-rank! So—"

"Quit it already!"

"Ow!"

An irritated adventurer had tried to shake off a boy begging to be included in his party, only for the boy to get knocked to the ground. Though the adventurer seemed to feel a bit of guilt at having pushed a little kid over, he still tutted in annoyance at being bothered, entering the dungeon.

"Oooh... That hurt..."

"Are you okay?"

"You're the two adventurer ladies from yesterday..."

The boy stood up, tears in his eyes. It seemed that he'd scraped his palms when he got knocked down.

"Here. Give me your hands."

"Why?"

"Just do it—*Water, Heal.*"

I used water magic to wash the dirt from his bleeding palms before closing the wounds up nicely with a healing spell.

"That was...just like Father does..."

"You seemed to think I'm just leeching off of Teto, but I'm C-rank too."

"Lady Witch is amazing! She can drop lightning down like boom, kaboom!" Teto said, trying to get across how great I was with sound

effects, but the boy just gave her a blank look.

“Anyway. Tell us what’s wrong.”

“...What could you do?”

“Anything we could. Aside from bringing a child somewhere dangerous.”

“But aren’t *you* a child too...?”

The boy pouted, looking away as he quietly sassed me. But he glanced back at us, sounding us out.

“Can I believe you guys?”

“Leave it to your elder sisters here,” I said, buying him a meat skewer and juice from a nearby food stand and sitting him down at the outdoor tables for adventurers.



“I’m Dan, one of the kids from the orphanage. It looks like our finances are in bad shape. The city’s lord gives us money, but it isn’t enough.”

“How many children are there, and what are their ages?”

“Right now, we’ve got two sixteen-year-olds training to be a priest and a sister helping to take care of the orphanage. All the older boys left on their own at fifteen. We have ten kids from twelve to fourteen, ten kids who’re nine to eleven like me, and twenty-three kids even younger.”

Conditions varied, but it should surprise no one that these kids were from circumstances. Some had adventurer parents who died, some were abused by relatives and relocated for their safety, and some were thrown away by their parents. Though some would find new families, that was very rare.

“Why do you want money? And why are you trying to get into the dungeon?”

“I want to make things easier for the Father, and let the littles live better. If I went in the dungeon and beat some monsters, my level would go up, I’d get stronger than I am now, and it’d be easier to earn money.”

I sighed at his naivete. The knife he had hidden was probably a gathering tool forgotten by one of the older kids who’d mustered out of the orphanage and taken up adventuring. Trying to challenge the dungeon with only this faint sliver of preparation would be like walking into a meat grinder. It was exactly because so many children would try that that the entrance to the dungeon was guarded, and only adventurers D-rank and over were allowed inside.

“Why were you asking adventurers to get you in when you know you can’t?”

“Yeah. You got brushed off and fell on your butt before!”

When Teto and I pointed out that he’d tried to get in with a party, he looked a bit guilty.

“There’s actually a way to get in the dungeon when you’re under D-rank...”

Little Dan went on to tell us about the loophole in the rules. Even if an adventurer was under D-rank, they would be able to enter the dungeon when with an adventuring party with an average rank of D or above. This was apparently because most adventurers didn’t have magic bags like Teto and I, instead having a porter join their party to carry their things for them. E-rank adventurers could take the gig to watch how the upper-rank adventurers fought, learn how to camp, and learn other things that would come in handy when they finally became D-rank.

“But isn’t that dangerous? I bet you’d barely get any share of the loot—I figure they’d expect any E-rank henchman of theirs would get the smallest share. That’s if they’re fairly well-adjusted; otherwise they might use you as monster bait, or let the tougher encounters chew on you while they retreat. That, or they might be looking to take you away as a slave, or they could be *real* sickos, acting nice to get close so they can kill you in the dungeon, where no one would know.”

“Huh...?”

Danny-boy stood there aghast, seemingly not having considered those possibilities.

Whatever the case, a small boy like him wouldn’t have been able to carry much anyway. The adventurers who turned him down might’ve actually done it out of kindness, not wanting a child to get hurt.

“Then what am I supposed to do?”

“...Hah... No way around it. I guess I’ll have to give you a hand.”

“But Lady Witch, you need both your hands.”

“No, I don’t mean literally...” I retorted at Teto with a little glare before giving the boy a suggestion. “Do you kids do herb gathering?”

“Huh? Yeah, of course. Those’re the only quests we can take, since we can’t get any higher than G- or F-rank.”

“Then do you know how much money you could sell a potion for, if you made one instead of just passing the herbs in?”

Dan started counting on his fingers, but since he didn’t know enough math or how to read very well, he got confused. “I-I dunno. I think we’d get lots of money, but I don’t know how much a potion sells for.”

“Ah, that’s true. For a normal herb-gathering quest, one bundle will get you two large copper.”

“Yeah. That’s usually what us orphanage kids get when we gather stuff together.”

“You can make three potions with one bundle of herbs. One potion sells for three silver.”

“That’s how much Father gets for his healing magic. And three’d be... Wow! Nine silver!”

Though they’d charge less for smaller wounds, the church’s healing magic normally went for about three silver. But as he realized all that, the boy’s expression warped.

“That’s not fair. We only get two large coppers going out of town to the plains to gather herbs, but the adults make potions out of them and sell them for three silvers...”

“That’s learning a trade for you. You earn more by using the materials than just selling the materials on their own. That’s why people study, to try to make a better life for themselves.”

It might've been hard for a child to understand. So I gave him an offer.

"I won't bring you into the dungeon. But I'll teach you how to make money."

"Really?"

"Yes. This city has a chronic potion shortage, which just means you kids need to gather herbs and make potions from them yourselves."

Danny-boy's eyes widened as he heard that, but he wilted just as fast.

"But that won't work. No one's gonna teach orphans like us how to make potions..."

In most towns, technical trades like mixology were family businesses, which rarely took apprentices to increase in number. That was why trades like that were hard to grow.

"I'll teach you how to make potions."

"Seriously?!"

"Yes, but we'll need to talk to the Father and ask him first. If he won't let you, we'll think of another way."

Saying that, our plans to dungeon-dive disappeared, and we headed to the church with Dan.

"You two are the ladies from yesterday... And that boy is..."

"Good morning, Father. Would we be able to speak to you about something, without you getting mad at Danny-boy here?"

Then I told him about what had happened in front of the dungeon today, about the dangers related to it, and how Dan still wanted to earn money. Then I made my suggestion.

"The children here are used to gathering medicinal herbs, so if a few of them were able to learn mixology, it would not only help them be independent in the future, but it would improve the situation in the orphanage as well."

"...I see... So he was thinking that..."

"Us kids know, Father. You need to get money for us orphans, so you go begging for alms from lots of people."

"...So the children noticed. It's one thing to abase oneself gathering alms, and another when those you care for see you looking pathetic about it. How embarrassing..."

"You're not pathetic, Father, or embarrassing!"

Dan interrupted the priest's long, deflating sigh, objecting immediately. Clearly the guy'd come by his children's adoration honestly.

"I understand. I'd like to take you up on your offer, Miss Chise. But teaching them won't be the end. The children need to be safe..."

"Yes, I know. I plan to get the adventurer's guild and maybe even

their superiors involved to make sure the children will be safe.”

I kept it a little vague, since I didn’t want to say anything unsettling in front of a kid like Dan, but the priest gave me a happy nod back.

“You must have many preparations to make, and I need to have a talk with this boy as well, so I must ask for you to leave for today. I believe Dan is in need of a lecture.”

“Understood. We’ll be off, then...”

“Get good and scolded~!”

“Huh, wha...? Wait, wai—!”

The priest’s smile was kind as he requested we leave, but the one he gave to Danny-boy had a little bit more pressure behind it. We left the room feigning ignorance as Dan probably got a gentle, sincere lecture from the priest about what he’d done today. Though us offering to help save the orphanage might have been a godsend, his attempts at getting into the dungeon were a completely different story.

Get a good scolding from the adults and grow up, Danny-boy.

Chapter 17: How to Get Accommodations

After we left Dan and the priest, we headed back to the guild. Since we'd decided we were going to save the orphanage, we planned on selling the highest-profit magic stone from the dungeon that we could to make some capital. In order to do that, Teto would have to hold off on eating them for a while.

And—

“Teto, I want to use *that*. Is that okay?”

“Teto already ate the one from the head, so you can do whatever you want with the rest, Lady Witch~!”

Thinking about how I'd need to make things up to her, since she wouldn't be absorbing any more any time soon, we entered the guild and headed straight for the reception counter.

“Hello. We'd like to speak to you about something.”

“All right. What would you like to speak about? Could it be that you've decided to sell the land dragon's magic stone and blood from yesterday after all?”

“Something like that. Would we be able to speak in another room, so we can take our time going over things?”

“Of course.”

And so, the receptionist and sales counter employee from yesterday brought us to another room, where I set a certain something on the table.

“Wha?! This stone is massive! And it...*isn't* the land dragon?! Something higher ranked?!”

“N-N-N-No way. You two defeated it? *Where?!* A monster of this level would've raised a huge fuss!”

While the guild employees panicked, I just spoke calmly.

“This is a family heirloom, passed down in my family. It's from a near-A-rank monster, if I remember correctly. I'd like to sell this to the guild. Or, no. I'd like to negotiate with the guild with this to get some accommodations.”

“Wh-Wh-What?! W-We don't take bribes here!”

They probably thought we were trying to get them to raise our rank. In order to clear up the misunderstanding, I explained in further detail.

“You told us yesterday that you would buy potions if we had

them, right?"

"Huh? Potions?"

"We ended up meeting with a child from the orphanage. I was planning on teaching him how to mix potions."

"An orphan? You mean from the church I sent you to yesterday?!"

The two guild employees were struggling to figure out how the line of thinking I'd opened with connected to the matter at hand.

"...This is all so sudden. We'll need to report to the guildmaster about this."

"Yes, please do. If possible, I'd like to speak with him as well," I said, waiting with Teto.

The receptionist left the room, coming back with a man in tow.

"You two're the ones trying to pull something funny?"

He was trying to intimidate us with his low, booming voice and muscular body, and by blasting out mana with his Body Strengthening, so I countered by letting my mana out at full strength back at him. Teto did the same, dropping the expression from her face as she let out everything she had.

As the three of us tried to intimidate each other, the receptionist and shop counter employee could only watch, trembling with chattering teeth. Noticing that, we all stopped.

"Sorry for testin' ya there. Had to do it, since you're a pair of C-ranks with an A-rank stone."

"A nasty ploy. And as I said, this is a magic stone that was passed down in my family as an heirloom. We weren't the ones to defeat it."

In actuality, the stone was from the water hydra I'd defeated a year earlier, but they didn't know that.

"So you're wanting some accommodations? How so?"

"We'd like to save an orphanage we've come into contact with by teaching the children how to mix potions and encouraging them to become independent."

"That's a funny whim. Doesn't Mixology take talent?"

The talent he was talking about wasn't in making potions themselves, but in adding the mana to them. A mage applied their mana to alter causality and manifest phenomena; in contrast, the gift of Mixology let the user suffuse their mana into an herbal medium to heighten its effects. You also needed a certain amount of mana to put any in the potion in the first place.

"If they don't learn the Mixology skill, you won't be saving anyone."

"They absolutely will."

"...If you're sayin' that, one of 'em must have that talent, huh."

Though the guildmaster took what I said that way, I actually had no idea if any of the children had the talent. But if, in the worst-case

scenario, none of the children had the aptitude, I'd just have to Create a Mixology skill orb with Creation Magic to give it to one, mix some strange fruit into their food to increase their mana pool, and lay the groundwork myself.

"From the guild's perspective, we'd buy potions from anyone, no matter who made 'em. But we're not gonna buy 'em at some special high price for ya. Not that that's what you're asking anyway, right?"

The guildmaster was treating us as equals, possibly because Teto and I had volleyed back so firmly.

"Our request is for the children's safety."

"Safety?"

"Yes, safety. Up until now, the children had gone outside of the city alone to gather herbs. If they gain the skills to make potions, their worth would skyrocket."

A kid with obvious Mixology talent would have a target painted on their back; whether through force or more insidious means—impersonation or simple bad-faith adoption came to mind—a bad actor could easily exploit them for free specialist labor.

"We wouldn't be able to protect the children if they were taken from the orphanage. That's why we'd like for the guild and guards to work together and keep the children safe. And we aren't just going to save one orphanage. We'd like to make this a model case, to save other ones as well."

"You...You aren't just some granny in the form of a kid, are ya?"

"Grr, how dare you treat my adorable Lady Witch like an old person!"

The guildmaster was giving me a very suspicious look, which made Teto, who'd been silent until then, speak up with a pout. I didn't fault him for being suspicious though, given the gulf between what I was saying and the way I looked. And who knows—my recall of my past life was so fuzzy that I could very well have passed at a respectable age. Plus, since I'd gained the Slowed Aging skill by raising my mana pool, the gap between my actual age and my physical appearance would only grow.

While I was thinking to myself, the guildmaster crossed his arms and groaned.

"Y'mean you want guards on the kids from the orphanage at all times to protect them? That'd be impossible. How long do you want it to go on, anyway?"

Though he'd heard the word "protect" and assumed I meant it straight as "guard," I shook my head.

"I don't mean it like that. I mean having trustworthy adventurers guide them and do things like teach them how to gather herbs correctly, or just worry about them, be friendly, talk to them. If they

had adults keeping an eye on them like that, it would deter people from bothering them, and if they would be able to identify anyone who took them, the guards could be sent out ASAP in the name of maintaining security.”

“Yeah, that *does* still sound like protecting.”

“And eventually, when the children leave the orphanage and become independent as mixologists, the demand for herbs will go up, and it will be beyond the supply on the outskirts of the city. When that happens, they’ll need to start going into the first or second floors of the dungeon to pick them.”

The plains areas of the dungeon were full of medicinal herbs to gather, and since it was a dungeon, they respawned quickly. Currently, only D-rank and higher adventurers could enter the dungeon. But I wanted to make it so that even children could go into just the first two floors under adult supervision. Then they could gather herbs *and* fight a few monsters, which would increase their mana pools enough to make potions.

Also, once winter hit for real, the whole city would be covered in snow, and they’d be able to gather drastically fewer herbs. I wanted to get them gathering from the dungeon in anticipation of that too.

“Other than that, I’d like for the guild to speak to the lord, and ask him not to lower the funds he gives to the orphanage, even if they become able to take care of themselves by making potions.”

“Why? If they could take care of themselves, why would they need more money from him?”

“What would happen on the off chance that the mixing techniques I’m teaching the orphans stop getting passed down? They’d have no income then. And what do you think would happen to the orphanage if people came from away to abandon their children, hearing they were taking care of themselves here?”

Without reserve funds, they’d quickly go under. And they’d eventually need to rebuild or add on to the orphanage, so thinking of problems like that, they’d need all the money they could get.

“The more I think, the more problems I imagine...”

“Wait, wait! I get most of what you’re saying, girl. But why’re you worrying about all that future shit? Are you some noble’s pet bureaucrat or something?!”

When I started thinking about how to protect the children from any and every possibility, I got dangerously close to thinking things like wanting to build them an underground shelter to run to if anything like that hydra I’d fought the year before ever attacked, only for the guildmaster to stop me in my tracks.

“Anyway, I got the gist of it. The guild’ll help you, and we’ll also bring your worries up to the lord.”

“Yes, please do.”

I was, of course, going to teach the children mixology, but once they had some money I was thinking about teaching them how to cook, set up a stand, and have them sell cookies to learn sales. I also thought about inviting retired adventurers to visit and teach them adventuring basics, make the orphanage into a site for children to learn job skills, and encourage them to learn not only mixology, but a comprehensive set of life skills.

“So why are you so worried about these orphans, anyway?”

“I don’t have parents either, so I just can’t get them off my mind.”

After I said that, the room fell oddly silent.

I’d been brought to this world and reincarnated by a goddess, so I had no one I could call a parent, and my conscience made me want to help people. Plus, I’d been able to survive because I was lucky enough to have my Creation Magic skill. Those kids deserved the same kind of chance I’d been given.

“For the time being, we’ll take your proposal and have a talk with the lord and Father Paulo. We’ll also coordinate with the other guilds.”

“Thank you for hearing me out. I’ll give this magic stone to the guild, then.”

“You’re way too generous. We ain’t givin’ this back, even if you ask for it, got it?”

And so, after leaving the guild, we belatedly entered the dungeon. Our original plan had been to just lazily gather some herbs, but instead we headed to the twenty-first floor. Then we backtracked to the twentieth floor, and I dropped some lightning magic *Thunder Bolts* on the land dragon while Teto chopped off its legs, defeating it.

Once we got the magic stone and dragonskin it dropped, we headed back to the guild to sell it. Seeing as we’d come in earlier with an A-rank stone, and now we were back after having killed the B-rank land dragon again, the receptionist gave us a look. But seeing as I had plans now that needed real financial leverage, I just sold the drops and took the eight small gold of profit.

Chapter 18: Saving the Orphanage

I stopped holding back. And a week later—

Every single day, Teto and I would teleport to the twenty-first floor, go back to the twentieth floor, kill the land dragon, and then go sell off the drops for money. All Teto and I needed to live was ten silver, so most of the profit went to buying food and daily necessities for the orphanage, and to buying the necessary tools for teaching mixology. Then Teto and I would bring it all to the church.

“Lady Teto, Lady Chise, welcome.”

“Hello, Father. Here’s today’s haul.”

Once we passed everything over to the priest, I asked about the orphanage.

“The city’s lord has no problems with the orphans selling potions, and it seems he’ll go ahead with your ideas to protect the children if they can make them steadily enough.”

It looked like the discussions by way of the guildmaster had finished. With this, the children who learned how to make potions would be safe, at the very least.

“That’s wonderful. I’d like to get teaching now. Would that be all right?”

“Yes, of course. Please take care of them from today on.”

I took Teto and headed back to the orphanage itself. There, Dan and other girls and boys around his age—plus a few older kids—were gathered, waiting.

“Danny-boy. I’ve come to teach you Mixology, just like I promised.”

“Seriously? The Father told us to assemble, but...”

The children were still dubious about the whole thing. Of course they would be more suspicious than anything, having a girl around their age teach them Mixology.

I headed to the orphanage’s kitchen to demonstrate how to make potions, but...

“The stove is cracked. There isn’t any firewood either.”

“Um... The cost of firewood is ridiculous, and there aren’t any nearby forests for us to gather from...”

Dungeon City was surrounded by plains, and there were no groves nearby. Because of this, the people of the city relied on wood cut in the forest zones from the dungeon’s eleventh floor for their fires. It

seemed that in Dungeon City, retired D-rank adventurers acted as woodcutters, felling timber in the dungeon and bringing it back to sell as firewood.

"I see. I'll use the firewood I have on hand for today, and next time I'll bring more. Don't worry about anything."

Taking a bundle of firewood I had for camping out of my magic bag, I showed them how to make a potion from step one.

First, I got out some normal medicinal herbs and washed the dirt off of them. Then, I used a knife to cut off the wilted bits before finely chopping the leaves and putting them in hot water. Then, using ten herbs, I made one potion. Normally, the amount of water used would be decided by the maker's intuition. But when I'd been learning Mixology in the pioneer village, I'd made a measuring cup with Creation Magic, testing out the best volumes for each potion.

"Okay, for ten herbs, you'd fill this cup to the 200 line. When you heat it all up, add another 100 to account for what will evaporate. When you're making more than two potions at once, even less will evaporate, but...let's just work on one potion at a time for now."

Bringing the herbs to boil in their own small pots, I stirred them to keep them from overboiling.

"As you stir, you want to transfer your mana through the wooden spoon and into the liquid while wishing for it to heal and make wounds better."

As I demonstrated, the medicinal components exuded from the herbs in the pot, mixing with my mana to shine light green.

The amount a potion would heal changed based on the freshness of the ingredients and the quality of the mana added. In my case, since I packed as much of my abundant mana as possible into a broth of fresh herbs, even the standard lower grade potions healed for nearly the same as a mid-grade high potion.

On an aside, the most complicated potions that existed in the world took court magician-class people with even more mana than I had now days of pouring mana into to make.

Getting back on track, I took the pot of finished potion off of the stove, strained the leaves off through some cloth, cooled it all down, put it in a bottle, and then showed them the finished product.

"Is anyone here hurt...? Yep. Try using this."

Some of the kids had skinned knees from falling while playing, while others had chapped fingers from housework. I had those children use the potion to show that it was the real thing.

"Wow, she really made a potion!"

"Okay, now all of you are going to take turns making one."

After showing them how to do it, I had them try it themselves. They'd all learned magic for daily living from the priest, so they were

able to manipulate their mana. The only problem was that their mana pools were so small that the potion broth would only dimly glow before flickering out repeatedly, so they weren't able to get much mana into the potion at all. About seventy percent of the finished potions were failures, and those that weren't were all awful quality, disappointing the children.

"You all did great for your first time. Do you understand why I had you only make one potion at a time now?"

"Yeah, it uses a ton of mana."

I'd looked at them all with my appraising monocle, and saw that they each had maybe 100 to 200 MP. That was enough total mana to make one mid-quality potion. Much too little to make two or three at once.

"Right now, you don't have much mana, so you'll need to be careful and just make one at a time. And the best way to get better is to keep steadily pouring your mana into the pot."

While there had been more failures than successes today, there were a few children out of them that had a knack for adding mana. If they grew up and grew their mana pools too, and got used to making potions, they might be able to control their mana consumption.

"Miss Chise! Lemme try making another potion!"

"I want to practice more too."

"Me too!"

"Me three!"

Starting from Dan, the kids all began calling out that they wanted to try again, but—

"Nope."

"Why?!"

"You need mana to make potions, and all of you are almost out of it. Instead, we'll be moving onto lectures until it regenerates," I told them, teaching them the types of medicines they could make with mixology, the ingredients, and how to mix them. I also taught them the basics of the potion-seller's craft: standard prices, how to read and write, basic math, and how to pour in a set amount of mana.

But—

"Brothers... Sisters..."

"Ahhh, stop that. We're learning how to make potions right now, so you can't come in!"

The older children like Dan were vastly outnumbered by the smaller kids at the orphanage.

"Teto, watch the small children for me."

"Got it. Everyone, let's go play!"

Teto, having a relatively young mental age, quickly made friends with the little kids, taking them out behind the orphanage to play.

First, they played in the garden with clay Teto made with Earth Magic. Partway through, they began telling her about the cracks and holes in the building, which she then went to fix. The children seemed to enjoy seeing her do this, so they pulled her along, cheering voices echoing through the building at every filled crack.

“Okay... It’s going to be lunch soon. Let’s get it ready.”

On my end, I noticed that the children I was teaching potion mixing to were nearing the limits of their concentration, so I used lunch as an excuse to end the lectures.

“Phwah... Big Sis Chise, you go way too hard.”

As Danny-boy complained, exhausted by all the studying he wasn’t yet used to, the other children all nodded their heads. At the same instant, the other kids all took to calling me “Big Sis Chise.”

I myself was aware that I was packing a lot in. But if they applied the Mana Control skill they’d learn by making potions to adventuring later, it would be a great help. For example, they could minimize the amount of mana they’d lose while using Body Strengthening. They could also focus their mana into their eyes to find ingredients containing mana like medicinal herbs easier. Abilities like that would be necessary for them to lead a more plentiful life than they had now. Even if they didn’t understand it at the moment, I wanted them to at least have it in the corner of their minds.

And so, at lunch—

“Yummy!”

All of the children cried out happily when they took a bite of the food we made. I even heard Teto mixed in with them.

“Yeah, it’s good, isn’t it? There’s lots more, so take your time eating.”

I’d used the food ingredients dropped by monsters we’d slain on our way to and back from defeating the Land Dragon for their lunch. The way the orphans ate seemed fun, with the elder children helping the younger ones out.

“Teto. I’m going to bring Father Paulo his lunch, so keep an eye on everyone.”

“Got it! Everyone, no being picky! Everything is yummy, so you’ve gotta eat it all!”

I set out bread, soup, and side dishes of meat and stir-fried veggies on a tray, carrying it out to the priest.

“Excuse me. I’ve brought you lunch, Father.”

“Oh, Lady Chise. I apologize for making you go out of your way.”

When I brought his lunch in, Father Paulo set aside what he was working on to take his tray.

“Oh my. Today’s meal is fancy!”

“I used some of the monster meat I had on hand... Was that too

forward of me?"

"No, I'm thankful. Sometimes, the orphanage receives donations of monster ingredients from adventurers, but neither the children nor I are very good chefs. Even though it's made with the same ingredients, the meal looks completely different."

After complimenting me with a little joke, Father gave a short prayer before digging in.

"Thanks to you, Lady Chise, I see a little bit of hope for our orphanage," he spoke, hands pausing. "If the children can learn something that will allow them to live independently outside of the orphanage, I can hope for their futures."

"I see. But please, don't expect too much from me. I'm an adventurer, and eventually I'll be leaving. My help here is only temporary."

"Yes, I know. But I still must be thankful."

Father Paulo must have known that the children making and selling potions wasn't something that would go on forever now that it was on track. Unless they put in the work to maintain it, it would all go to pieces, whether that would be in one year, five years, ten years...or even further down the line. But trying to save the orphanage anyway was just in my nature.

"Well then, I'll be going back to the children now."

"All right. I'll be heading off to speak with the adventurer's guild, mixing guild, and the lord."

Just as I was about to leave with his plates and cutlery, Father Paulo spoke again.

"You're a strange one. You look around the same age as the children here, yet your spirit and your conduct seem just as mature as I am."

"...Really? I just had a unique birth."

"What could I ever do to repay you?" he asked, looking so troubled that he might even cry.

It would be easy to say I didn't need anything in return. But if I did, it would always weigh on his heart. So—

"Then I'd like for you to teach me some of the magic the church uses. I'm a magic-loving witch, after all."

"If that's the case, I'll prepare one of the church's grimoires for you."

"I'm looking forward to that quite a bit," I said back, taking his tray and leaving.

Chapter 19: Two Months of Progress

Two months had passed since we'd first set foot into Dungeon City.

Every day, I ate my strange fruit and dropped some lightning on the twentieth floor's land dragon, so my mana pool had grown past 18,000. We also kept selling the land dragon drops to the guild to earn money.

"Eight small golds a day. It's nice that prices haven't declined with all of the farming we've done."

Continually farming the twentieth floor's gatekeeper wasn't actually the best method to earn money.

Most D-rank adventurers could never beat it, and C-rank parties might be able to manage with proper planning, preparations, and a lot of luck. B-ranks and up would probably be able to farm it like us, but if they were a full six-person party, the rewards per person wouldn't be any good. They'd earn a lot more killing monsters from the twenty-first floor on than going for one strong one.

The only ones who could farm it with the same efficiency as we could, Arsus's A-rank party, the Swords of Daybreak, were busy trying to get past the twenty-fourth floor.

"Chise, Teto, please, take the exam!"

"What exam?"

"The one to bump you two to B-rank! There's no way a duo who farms a land dragon every single day should be C-rank! The guildmaster okayed it too!"

"Ah... Fine, fine. When we have time. We're busy right now."

Back in Darryl, Teto and I had gotten special permission to rise up to C-rank since we'd defeated a group of ogres, though we only jumped to D-rank because Teto wanted to. But on our way to Dungeon City, we'd done tons of quests, and we jumped right up automatically to C-rank as soon as we hit the conditions, thanks to arrangements made by the guildmaster in Darryl. And now we were being asked to take our very first adventuring exam to hop up to B.

But whatever the case, we were currently busy.

"Let's start your potion-making practice for today!"

"Okaaay!"

The pool of kids learning Mixology had dropped to around half of what it was originally. The other half of the kids hadn't given up on it,

but they were focusing on concentrating mana in their eyes to search for medicinal herbs, since they'd shown promise there. And, since it was hard to gather herbs in the snow during winter, the guildmaster had given them special permission to gather herbs from the first and second floors of the dungeon, with Teto as their escort.

"Let's get to it, then."

I led the children to the building beside the orphanage. We'd used the money that we earned from farming the land dragon to buy it, making it into a potion-making facility.

Other than that—

"Big Sis Chise! We got some sawdust and twigs from the sawmill!"

"Thanks. Let's get started."

Most of the wood used in Dungeon City came from the eleventh floor of the dungeon on down. And from the abundance of wood the woodcutters brought back, the massive amount of twigs and branches, sawdust, and other wood waste ended up getting thrown back into the dungeon. The dungeon absorbed the trash back into itself, making the city very ecologically friendly, but I decided we could use the waste for the orphans.

"Papermaking squad, you start too!"

"Okaaay!"

My idea was that we could collect all the wood waste thrown away, boil it all up in a big pot, and use it to make paper. On Earth, you needed to boil it with chemicals to break it down, but we were in another world. There was a potion that could be made with the core of a Green Slime that could dissolve plant fibers, so I had the kids who learned Mixology make it to boil down the wood.

Incidentally, those same green slimes spawned in the plains areas of the first and second floors of the dungeon where the children were gathering herbs anyway, making it easy to collect.

Once the fibers were broken down, they'd wash them with clean water. Then they'd dissolve wheat in water and heat it to make a paste, mixing it and the fibers together before pouring it all uniformly through a wood-framed mesh and setting that on a wooden plank. They'd already made a few hundred sheets of paper, and we'd sent samples of it to the adventurer's guild, the regional lord, and the higher-ups in the Church.

The Church took especially well to the papermaking, giving Father Paulo full-blown financial support in making it. Up until then, bibles had been super expensive to make, so the fact that they could now make them cheaper would make it easier for their religion to spread. And by having the children copying those bible scriptures onto their paper, they could both improve the kids' literacy and make even more bibles.

It seemed that they'd even gotten requests from commercial guilds to buy paper as well.

The kids were doing a good job learning Mixology techniques, and were able to make the common potions sold in town. The guild was buying them at a price of one silver and five large coppers per. Normally, they'd buy them at two silver per, but they were taking a bit under the condition that they'd protect the orphans if anything happened to them. But even then, the kids were absolutely thrilled, since they were getting seven times the two large copper they'd get from just selling the herbs themselves.

"Big Sis Chise! My Mixology skill hit Level 2 yesterday!"

Dan, who'd been the first one to come talk to me, had been studying very seriously, and let me know that his efforts had borne fruit as an actual skill.

"Congratulations. It might just be about time for me to back off."

"Sis?"

"Okay. Everyone involved in Mixology, come here!" I called, gathering the kids. "These are books I made with the paper you made. Forgive how ugly they are."

I pulled ten books out of my magic bag. They were really badly made: the pages were edited by me and copied out by Teto, with holes poked through and threaded with string.

"Inside these books are the Mixology basics I taught you, practical uses, and some standard recipes."

"Huh? What?"

"I've supported you guys until you could be self-reliant. Now you should be able to make most of the potions in that book through trial and error while reading it over, and if you use it to teach the other kids, they should be able to learn the Mixology skill themselves. So you all do your best. I'll be going back to adventuring."

The children started crying and clinging to me, saying they wanted to learn more, and didn't want me to leave. I used Body Strengthening to keep myself upright, smiling bitterly at how attached they'd gotten in two months.

"Come now, children. You mustn't bother Lady Chise like that."

"Father..."

"And while she'll be going back to adventuring, that doesn't mean she'll never come back to the orphanage again."

"Yep. I'll come back every once and again, until we leave town for our next destination," I said, patting each kid on the head to calm them down. Or rather, I would have, except some of them were hitting their growth spurts, meaning I couldn't even reach their heads. For those, I just patted them on the shoulder or arm.

"I have some very important things to discuss with Lady Chise, so

we'll be heading back to the church. Everyone, make sure to follow her instructions."

"Okaaaay!"

The children finally started to back off at Father Paulo's bidding.

He brought me back inside the church and to one of the rooms—the same room we'd gone to on our first day here, when we'd come to get that necklace's curse cleansed—where we sat across from one another.

"Let's get things settled then."

"Yes, let's begin."

I rummaged around in my magic bag and took out the deed for the land and building that we'd been using for potion and papermaking next to the orphanage, while Father Paulo took out a very fancily bound book and contract. It was pretty lengthy, but the gist of it was: I would transfer ownership of the potion/papermaking building I'd bought with my own funds to the Church, and help the children become self-sufficient.

In exchange, as thanks, the Church would give me one of their grimoires.

I speed-read the contract before picking up a pen and signing my name. Then Father Paulo signed his very long name (whether it was a baptismal name or because he was originally a noble, I didn't know), and the contract was sealed.

The adventurer's guild and the city's lord had been giving us their full assistance getting the orphanage self-reliant in these two months. What's more, Teto and I had covered all the start-up costs of getting them there, along with my magic forcing the whole issue along. Now, I'd given the finished establishment to the Church, and got one of the main sacred magic grimoires the Church used in return.

"This grimoire is said to contain spells imitating the miracles that the goddess brought about when She descended unto our world. Though I myself am only able to use the first half or so."

"Thank you. I'll be very careful while reading it."

"It is usually forbidden for anyone but a select few in the Church of the Five Goddesses to possess that book, but you've easily gained the qualifications. Were you to enter the Church, you would most likely be given the title of saint!"

I struggled to hold back a laugh at the insinuation that a creepy hooded girl like me could qualify. "I'm a witch, though."

"No. I have no doubts that you are a saint—just one unaffiliated with the Church," Father Paulo said with a gentle smile, ending the conversation.

"Well then. I'll go meet up with Teto. It's about time for lunch."

"Ah, lunch. I'm looking forward to it!"

Saying that, I struck off to make lunch for the children. Noon was about the time when Teto brought the children who'd gone into the dungeon back, and the orphanage's dinner table was at its liveliest. I liked spending time with such innocent children. It soothed my heart.

Chapter 20: Father Paulo's Monologue

Father Paulo's Side

Many things had happened before I came to find myself in this city.

I was born the son of a noble, and with my noble blood came the obligation to join the Church at a young age. Granted, that obligation was just a nice way to say “getting rid of a fifth son.” Luckily for myself, I had a talent for magic.

Entering the Church, where Lady Liriel of the Five Great Goddesses was worshiped, I learned Sacred Magic, healed people, did away with misfortunes, cleansed curses, and strove to worship the five goddesses who managed our world.

The Church of the Five Great Goddesses taught that a Creator God birthed our nine continents, then birthed gods to lead the people of each. Our continent was watched over by five Goddesses: Lariel, Liriel, Luriel, Leriell, and Loriell. Our Church venerated the goddesses and practiced their teachings.

The creation myths were ancient, and anecdotes from the Five Great Goddesses were the foundation of our common mythology.

Though it was said that humanity used to travel between the nine continents prior to the great calamity that befell our world two thousand years ago, we were currently lacking in the nautical technology to reach the lands beyond our own. But though we did believe they existed, because of items that sometimes seemed to drift to our shores, the rest of the world was unknown to us... But allow me to get back on my original topic.

In my youth, I was touted as a future cardinal of the Church, but I was envied and alienated, sent to this city with its dungeon, and made to give up on rising in rank.

But that was where my faith was truly tested.

As the manager of the city's church and orphanage, I sometimes spoke with the regional lord, preached the teachings of the gods and saints to the people on the sabbath, and worked hard to give the children who had lost their parents some stability.

I could do it. Despite my convictions, I quickly met setbacks and had to make compromises, but I still worked hard to keep the children

from starvation. Sometimes I wanted to borrow the help of the goddess, locking myself in one room of the church to pray.

That didn't change a thing for our daily life, but some of the children showed promise, and after teaching them Sacred Magic, I sent them off from the orphanage. Some of those children became priests in smaller churches in the region, while others became adventurers, healing those who were injured. Some of the other children I let go empty-handed were blessed in their connections to other people, blessed with jobs, and gave back a tiny bit of what they earned to repay the church's kindness.

But that still wasn't enough, and as I considered leaving the gradually declining children to the next priest, they appeared. Two adventurers: Lady Chise, a black-eyed, black-haired young mage, and Lady Teto, a cheerful, golden-skinned woman. The mage girl, Lady Chise, who I will speak the most of, spoke in a quite composed manner. She gave me the relieving feeling that I was speaking to someone my own age, despite being nearer to my own wards.

The two came, had a curse lifted from a necklace they'd found, and donated a little bit. While I was thinking to myself that the money could be used to feed the children something nice for a while, Dan, one of the children from the orphanage, came to beg them to bring him into the dungeon.

Due to my shamefulness, the small children would go outside of town to collect medicinal herbs, but I couldn't allow them to enter the dungeon, where monsters lurked. As children, they had no way to protect themselves.

After I scolded him, Dan ran off. Seeing this, Lady Chise donated even more money and food. They'd only come to have their item cleansed, but they gave more upon hearing about the orphanage's situation. I was grateful.

But the days of surprises kept coming.

When Lady Chise came back the next day, she was escorting Dan back after he tried to enter the dungeon; she told me that she'd teach the children to make potions. She would be teaching them how to be self-reliant and earn money, and give them the tools to do it, all out of her own pocket.

She even got the adventurer's guild and the regional lord involved, birthing a large-scale framework for getting us on our feet. The adventurer's guildmaster knew of our plight, possibly because he was close to adventurers who had come from the orphanage, and gave suggestions to our benefit. The lord also heard our pleas, and his ministers brainstormed issues and put things in place.

Though I had spoken to the guildmaster about healing the injured, when I tried to thank him for bringing up suggestions to help the

orphanage—

“That girl was the one who told me to. She told me to make sure that the usual donations to the church wouldn’t be lessened, even when the kids can make potions, all in case the Mixology thing didn’t last and you ended up with no income. But since that’d leave the orphanage open for some misappropriation, they’ll be keeping watch and coming down to check on the kids every once in a while. Don’t get down about it.”

After that, there were many talks between us and the lord about how donations to the orphanage would be dealt with.

Thinking of things from my perspective as a priest of the church, I wanted them to keep donating as they always had, but most of the money they donated came from the citizen’s taxes, and there was a limit to them.

From the officials’ perspective, if there were going to be surplus funds, the donation should be reduced by the surplus, with the spare money going to needy citizens and other orphanages.

The lord himself wanted to lower the amount given to the orphanage, but if we were to become completely self-reliant, we’d lose our connection to them through the donations, and there was a chance they would lose out on promising future hires.

The guildmaster wanted more mixologists for a more stable supply of potions. He also wanted stability for the orphanage itself, since many of the orphans were the children of adventurers.

Our first round of talks finished with no settlements in sight, and I had to report that to Lady Chise.

“...Yeah. I guess they can’t prioritize only the orphanage, can they?”

“I apologize, Lady Chise. You left this matter to me, and I...”

“No, it’s my fault for focusing only on the orphanage. I need to look at the bigger picture too.”

“No, Lady Chise. It’s normally quite difficult to see things from the overhead view a god would have,” I told her, but she still began thinking about how she could improve things for not only the orphanage, but the rest of the city.

I brought the ideas the two of us had thought up to my next meeting with the lord and his officials, and over another many meetings, we searched for common ground. In the end, it was decided that while the donations to the church’s orphanage would be lowered incrementally, the donations themselves would continue, and that the orphanage would take on part of the city’s cleaning activities, which the lord had taken upon himself to spearhead.

Though the little details were changed a bit, most everything still went just as Lady Chise planned. I really wondered how far ahead she

had thought things through. She also had the foresight to think of how the wooden trash that was disposed of within the dungeon could instead be quickly turned into paper, raising profits further. The thought began to cross my mind that Liriel herself had sent a saint to lift us up on her behalf.

“Father, if you use the paper that the children create to make more bibles, you’ll be able to spread your faith further. That would make it easier to get funds from the higher-ups in the Church, and the orphanage here with its potion and papermaking facilities could be a model case for how orphanages in other towns could be built.”

“Lady Chise, you...”

“—Or, well, that’s all lip service. What I really want is to make it easier for the kids to learn how to read and write. You guys get all your lumber from the dungeon, so you’d never run out of charcoal to write with.”

“You would use the paper you could sell for profit for the children instead?”

“Yep. The children should know how to read, write, and do math when they leave the orphanage. My first priority is teaching them all that and Mixology. Profits are second. And if the kids are earning money, that means less work for you, Father, which means you could teach them to read and write while copying out scriptures.”

Saying that, Lady Chise pulled out a number of instruction books on Mixology, making paper, and reading and writing. She told me to send them to the higher-ups in the church. They were all handwritten by her and Lady Teto.

Two things came about from the children studying with paper. Firstly, the books that Lady Chise gave me were copied once again, bound properly, and became used by churches all over the continent. Secondly, by having the children use paper, we were able to learn that some children had special talents. One child’s drawing led them to become the city’s sign maker, while another’s detailed art led them to become the Church’s exclusive religious painter. Paths to independence that they’d never considered before opened up for them.

Her ability to look to the future for the children made Lady Chise seem like an oracle or witch, her spirit like an all-loving saint, and when she was praised, she got embarrassed just as a girl her age should.

In an attempt to be of some help to her, I gave her a grimoire full of Sacred Magic based on the miracles of the Goddesses that the Church had given to me. Though I had been far too busy with my day-to-day life here to practice them, she would definitely be able to put them to work.

Chapter 21: The Wasteland of Nothingness and the Dream Oracle

Teto and I were holed up in our apartment as a midwinter blizzard struck the city. Teto hugged me from behind as we both sat on the bed and I perused the grimoire that Father Paulo had given me.

“I see, so this is what Sacred Magic can do...”

The types of magic that I used were Origin Magic, which changed the properties of my mana to recreate natural phenomena, and Body Strengthening, which I used by pairing my knowledge of science, medicine, and bodily makeup from my past life with cleansing and healing magic. My other main type of magic was Creation Magic, which used creative mental images.

On the other hand, Sacred Magic was based on mimicking the various miracles that the five goddesses that the church revered used.

For example, there was—

Mana Blast: hitting something with pure mana.

Purification: disassembling a curse or magic life-form’s mana and cleansing it.

Turn Undead: cutting the link between a deceased person’s soul and their mana, sending them back into the cycle of reincarnation.

Sense Enemy: sensing and detecting nuances in hostility or malice from a target.

Bless: using your own mana to use Body Strengthening on another.

“Unaspected magic is really handy.”

Though the Church called it Sacred Magic, if things were classified, most of the spells used pure mana as unaspected magic.

As I went through the grimoire and checked each spell one by one, it looked like I could do most of it. I was especially glad that it provided so many anecdotes and explanations unpacking the five Goddesses’ miracles and the derived magic—vital information for spells that required a mental image. The only stumbling block was that, since it was an evangelical text, it had tons of weird phrases and roundabout expressions, giving me a glimpse into the religious side of things.

“...Whoops. I got myself off-topic there.”

“Lady Wiiiitch, is that book interesting?”

“Yes, very. I’ll show you the new spells I’m learning sometime, Teto.”

“I’m looking forward to it~!”

Reading further into the book, I reached a certain spell.

“Ah, this is barrier magic.”

The grimoire said that spells in the *Barrier* line of magic that I normally used while camping created a boundary at a set location, demarcating the space. Other than blocking enemy attacks, it could also apparently be used in the opposite way to seal something somewhere.

I always used barrier spells without thinking too deeply into it, but it was interesting to see it explained from another point of view.

Within the explanation was an anecdote related to barriers.

“It says, ‘In ancient times, after the great calamity befell the world, the five goddesses placed a massive barrier over the land, barring humanity from entry. That land was where humanity had broken a taboo, and through divine punishment had become a wasteland. Now, it is called the Wasteland of Nothingness.’ Ooh, there’s a map too.”

The map of the continent inside the grimoire wasn’t properly scaled, and predated Ischea’s relocation of the capital from Apanemis. It was probably around two hundred years old I guessed as I looked over it. Though the country lines and major city names had changed thanks to wars, pioneering, and an increase in demon nests, it wasn’t all that different. And in the very middle of the map, touching many different countries and borders, was a large blank space.

“I’ve found the Wasteland of Nothingness!”

Just what you’d expect from a grimoire kept within the Church of the Five Goddesses, which spanned the whole continent. Even if the human details were out of date, the geography still held up. And so, to the north of Ischea and surrounded by a number of other different countries was the Wasteland of Nothingness.

“I see. So that’s where it was... Hm? Wait. That means...”

Though it wasn’t a properly scaled map, the blank spot was still, by all appearances, the size of a small country. And more than that...

“Isn’t that where I was reincarnated?”

“It was? Then Lady Witch must’ve made Teto somewhere around here!”

There was a town labeled Darryl near the border to the north of Ischea. It seemed the spot I’d been reincarnated at was around the outer edge of the Wasteland of Nothingness. I hadn’t noticed the barrier created by the goddesses back then, but looking back on it, there had been an unnatural distinction between the edge of the wasteland and the forest. At that point in time, I hadn’t learned Body Strengthening or how to focus mana to my eyes with Mana Perception, so I might see things entirely differently now.

“Whew. Now we know where it is. But to think, it was *there*.”

It was true that there was nothing but some sparse weeds and slimes there—a wasteland with absolutely nothing of value. The travel log that I’d read before was old, and mixed in a lot of the writer’s opinions, but it probably wasn’t wrong.

“Now that we know where the Wasteland of Nothingness is, next we need to get famous and rich enough to own it ourselves. We need to achieve more as adventurers, and farm cash for a while in the dungeon.”

“Then I’ll beat up lots and lots of monsters and earn money with Lady Witch!”

As Teto hugged me, I chuckled and agreed before returning my eyes to the grimoire.

The last half of the book was full of much more difficult spells. In particular, Father Paulo had written a note on one page.

“I was only able to learn the spells up to this point. But since you’re so young, Lady Chise, I believe you’ll reach the end of the discipline and save many people.”

He also wrote that his personal mana pool was about 15,000 MP, making him court magician-level.

“So these are spells the father couldn’t cast with his mana pool...”

The grimoire listed spells that did things like resurrect those who died within a certain period of time, regrow lost limbs, conjure oracles, summon the might of heaven—all kinds of miracles. They probably took somewhere from a few tens of thousands of MP on up.

“Resurrecting the dead and regrowing things seem like they’d be handy, but...” I turned my neck, looking at Teto behind me.

“What’s wrong, Lady Witch?”

“No, nothing.”

Magic for humans probably wouldn’t mean much at all to someone who’d evolved from a golem like Teto. She didn’t have a brain or heart that any CPR could work on, and she could just remake any lost limbs with soil and rocks.

And if I was going to use them on myself, I’d have to be in a super bad situation. I’d lose nothing from never being able to use limb regeneration magic. Everything past that point was oracular magics, but—

“It’d be nice if I was absolutely sure that it was *the* goddess Liriel who reincarnated me.”

Slipping out of Teto’s arms, I started following the instructions written in the book to receive an oracle. Though it said that only devout followers could receive one, I’d actually met her, so it was easy to envision her.

I thought I could do it, but...

“Nothing is happening...”

“Lady Wiiiitch, I’m hungry~!”

“Okay. Let’s do lunch.”

After saying that, we ate, then I spent the rest of the afternoon reading more of the grimoire. By nighttime, I’d completely forgotten about the failed oracle spell and just fell asleep in Teto’s arms. When I came to, I was in a weird kind of space, and a beautiful, familiar woman was waiting for me.

“Liriel? The goddess? What? Did I die again?”

“No. Your spell created a link to me. I thought that it might be better to meet you in a dream rather than giving you an oracle there.”

“I see...”

So I was just dreaming. I was relieved that I hadn’t died and left Teto alone. I would have been so worried if that had happened.

“I’ve been watching you. I’m thankful for what you’ve done for the orphanage.”

“It’s a little embarrassing that you’ve been watching. But should a goddess be thanking me?”

I was under the impression that gods would be more high-and-mighty, so I was a bit weirded out receiving her gratitude.

“I had given Father Paulo a little bit of a blessing. I’m thankful that you helped lessen his burden. We gods manifest our power through people’s mana and piety. Your actions have raised the people’s faith in the Five Great Goddesses and given us the chance to increase our influence on the land.”

“So what are you going to do with that increased interference force or whatever? And why was I reincarnated here?”

I had lots of questions, and despite my memories being fuzzy, I had a strong sense that I had lived in Japan, a country of people known to be both polytheistic and atheistic at the same time. I wanted to know the truth of the gods.

“We normally don’t tell our reincarnators anything, but I suppose I could tell you about the Wasteland of Nothingness at least. In short, this world currently has a mana shortage.”

“Mana shortage?”

“In this world, many organisms release mana from their bodies, while other organisms absorb that mana, making a cycle. But it’s been two thousand years since the world’s mana was drained by the rampant abuses of the precursors. Because of this, cultures supported by mana have declined, higher-ranked monsters and phantasmal animals have been pushed to the brink of extinction, there are fewer mages, and the world has stagnated.”

“What does that have to do with my reincarnation?”

“Us gods can use the mana we gain through faith to temporarily

create a path to another world. Through this, we gain both the mana that Earth doesn't use due to its scientific civilization and the soul of a reincarnator. Then, we send both the reincarnator and the highly concentrated mana to a location with little mana to raise its concentration."

"So that's how you use your godly powers, and why I was reincarnated into the Wasteland of Nothingness."

"Correct. Rightfully, the mana we gain from the people's piety should be used to bring about miracles to save them, but that does nothing to help with the mana drought. Currently, we raise barriers around particularly mana-drained locations to keep humans and mana out, then bring in reincarnators and the otherworldly extra mana to try to raise the concentration."

I had no way of telling if she was being truthful or not, but I somewhat believed her.

"But wouldn't that mean you don't need the reincarnators at all, since you've got that bonus mana coming in from their worlds?"

If mana had a path, it would naturally flow from the denser places to the thinner. Then why couldn't they just keep the pathway to other worlds open and use that mana?

But Liriel just gave me a troubled look and shook her head. "There are a number of limitations regarding the pathways between worlds. If we were to open too many, we would risk merging our worlds. And keeping those pathways open takes an absolutely tremendous amount of mana."

"Then, why—?"

"Each path we open gives us about 500,000,000 MP. But if we give the reincarnators power and extend their lives, the amount of mana they'll naturally expel over their lifetimes will surpass that."

By defeating monsters and leveling up, a reincarnator's mana pool would generally grow to somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 MP. Once they got that much, they generally gained the Slowed Aging skill and lived longer lives, which meant the amount of mana they put out over their lifetime would grow that much. If they became adventurers, they could become stronger in a party, and if those reincarnators with their high mana pools had children, there would be a higher chance that those children would also have large mana pools. In the end, the world would gain more mana than by connecting the paths alone.

"So that's why you told me to live as long a life as possible when I reincarnated. But I still don't get it, why do you reincarnate the souls of otherworlders? Why can't you just use the souls of people from here?"

The Five Goddesses had a whole religion worshipping them. Why couldn't they just give their believers some divine revelation or

something? I wouldn't truly accept things until I found out why it had to be *me*.

"Though we gods can interfere somewhat based on our authority, we have limits on what else we can do. My younger sister Loriel, the Goddess of the Underworld, has authority over the souls that have left their physical bodies."

It seemed that because of that, even if Liriel found a proper soul for reincarnation in this world, Loriel the Goddess of the Underworld would have more authority and priority over the soul than Liriel would as the Earthmother. Loriel also already scrubbed the deads' souls of their memories and reincarnated them as new beings to help fill the world with mana, simply believing that as long as new lives were born, the mana they would release would slowly fill the world.

"Loriel has been in a sleep-like state in order to deal with the toll of sustaining the world through the rampancy and the mana drought. She already automatically reincarnates everyone, so I can't do anything with them."

Seeing the faint hint of exhaustion in her face, I knew how I felt.

"Okay. I'll believe you."

Liriel's expression morphed to shock in an instant.

"You'll believe me, even though you doubt us?"

"At first, I couldn't believe you, since you were so straight faced while you explained things in such a businesslike way. But I can't avoid sympathizing with someone trying to pull their world back from too long on the brink; if I can help, I will."

Plus, in my past year of traveling this alternate world and reading everything I could get my mitts on, I knew it was true that some calamity had struck the world—whatever Liriel meant by the precursors' rampancy—in the distant past.

"You're sympathizing with a goddess? But I'm glad you would say that," Liriel said, giving me a very humanlike wry smile.

"You're finally smiling like a person. I like you better like that."

"Gods need to be dignified, though. Hah..." she said, sagging her shoulders a little before giving me a look. "It's almost time. Dream oracles take a lot of mana, so this is the end. I'll send you another one when you have more time and mana to spare."

"Hey, wait!"

The Goddess Liriel vanished, and the strange space I was in faded to black and disappeared. "Lady Witch, you were groaning a lot. Are you okay?"

"U-urgh, Teto, good morning..."

Teto shook me awake. The Dream Oracle seemed to have drained a massive amount of mana from me, and had ended abruptly as my tank went empty. I spent the whole day resting in bed, nursing my

mana hangover by knocking back mana potion after mana potion.

Chapter 22: The Orphans Get Kidnapped

A while after paving the way to save the orphanage, Teto spent our time making day trips to the dungeon and mapping it out as we waited for the date of our B-rank exam. About two times a week, we'd drop in to the orphanage to see how the kids were doing, and bring ingredients to bake cookies with the younger kids.

Two weeks later, when we'd made it to the twenty-third floor—"Chise, Teto! The date for your exam has been decided!"

"Really?"

"Yes. In two weeks, you'll enter the dungeon with Arsus and his Swords of Daybreak, camping inside to explore the floors from twenty-one on. It will go on for three days."

"Got it. We'll be camping there to show them our planning abilities."

From that day on, we lowered the frequency of our dungeon trips and spent our time getting ready to spend a few days inside. Though really, our "getting ready" only consisted of making tools with Creation Magic and stuffing the things we bought in town inside of our magic bag, so we finished pretty quickly. We spent the rest of our time visiting the kids.

And so, the day of our exam came. When we went to the guild, our examiners were waiting for us.

"Arsus. We're looking forward to spending the next three days with you for the exam."

"Yep, we are!"

"Good! Let's get to your briefing."

The Swords of Daybreak told us how our exam would play out. Inside of dungeons, especially closed spaces like cave types, it was very easy for psychological issues to set in. Thus they'd be running us through practicums to see how we'd deal with exhaustion, if we were resting properly, our effectiveness at searching the dungeon, and the like, to judge our comprehensive abilities outside of talent.

As both of our parties discussed problems we assumed we might run into, a familiar child ran through the guild entrance in a panic.

"Sis, Big Sis Chise! Teto! Help!"

"You're from the orphanage. What's wrong?"

"Bro... Dan and the others got taken!"

I tried my best to get the boy calm enough to brief us clearly. It seemed that while some of the potion-mixing group were out buying daily supplies, some adults cornered them in an alleyway and took them away. Dan and a few others resisted, and one of the younger kids took the chance to run, coming here to the adventurer's guild for help. While both the guild and the lord had taken measures to protect the kids, apparently it wasn't enough.

"I've got it. Leave it to us."

"You're going? What about your exam to jump to B-rank?" Arsus asked, clearly trying to provoke me.

Since the exam to move up to B-rank required cooperation from adventurers who were higher than B-rank, it wasn't something that could be done frequently. There were also other adventurers waiting to take it, so if we let this chance go, we might not get another chance for more than half a year.

I let out a snort. "I don't care about the exam. Saving the kids ASAP is more important."

I didn't care whether our move up to B-rank was delayed, or even if we'd never get the chance to move up again. As I thought that and stared right back at Arsus, he let out an amused chuckle.

"Hey, Raphilia! Use your magic to search for those kids!"

"You're so bossy. *O spirits, follow the traces of the children, and lead us to them!* As long as they're somewhere the wind reaches, I'll find them. We should turn them up quick if they're in the city."

"Thank you. But is it really okay?"

Here I was, throwing away our chance to take the B-rank exam, but Arsus just shot me back a grin.

"Our party's priest came from that orphanage, so it's personal," he said, jerking a thumb back at his party member, who was clearly forcing a straight face. "Plus, who could turn down a chance to be owed a favor from a pair as talented as you two?"

"I see. Then I'll work hard to pay you back as soon as we can."

That short back-and-forth was plenty for both of us. Soon enough, Raphilia's Spirit Magic ferreted out the children. We had one of the guild employees take care of the boy who'd run to us for help, and had them send out another few parties to make sure none of the other children would get kidnapped as well.

"If you need any money to get the other adventurers moving, use as much from this as you want."

"Wha, Chise?! You're just leaving your guild card here?! And how much do you have saved if you can say it like that?!"

And with that, we took off. Since my stride length as a child would make it hard to keep up with how fast Arsus and Teto were running, even with Body Strengthening, I flew there—not something

you're supposed to do within city limits, but what did I care?

"So where are the children?"

"There, probably!"

Raphilia, who'd been running at the head of the group, had brought us to a street lined with warehouses near the outskirts of the city.

"The kids are here?! If they're this close, I should be able to zero in on Dan's mana!"

Sure enough, Danny-boy and a number of other children's signatures flared to life underneath the biggest warehouse.

"There!"

"Lady Witch, it's dangerous for you to run off ahead!"

"Hey, Chise!"

Still flying, I dropped low, barreling into the warehouse.

"What the hell?!"

"You're in the way! *Stun!*"

As I landed, I ran into a bunch of thugs readying their weapons. A tamped-down, wide-bore lightning spell incapacitated them, sending them screaming to the floor.

"Where are the children? Tell me!" I yelled, using Body Strengthening to give me the arm strength to lift one of the men by his collar.

"...N-Nyo ideea," the man said, paralyzed and slurring. "Y-Yer nyot gonnya get away wit dyoin' dis to us..."

As if any warning that clichéd was going to dissuade *me*; I let the mana flow out of my body, turning up the pressure.

"I'll say it again. Where. Are. The. Kids?!"



The group of thugs trembled under the power of over 10,000 MP leaking from my body.

“S-Spyare us! We’re jjust hyred mussle!”

While I tried to listen to what the men were saying, Teto and Arsus’s party came following me.

“Chise, don’t rush in! Wait... You already took ’em out?”

“Hey, these are Gus’s guys!”

“The Swords of Daybreak are here... We’re done for.”

Seeing Arsus and company coming up behind me, the thugs gave up completely, their spirits already broken by my mana. Just what you’d expect from the brand power of an A-rank party.

“...So where are the kids?”

“The kids are down in the basement. But we don’t have the key to open the magic door. The boss handles it! We just keep ’em fed and watered!” the men said after Arsus and his party had tied them up.

At this distance, I was able to use the wind spell *Whisper* to pick up on the children’s voices. They were all terrified, holding back sobs as they tried to comfort each other.

Rage welled up from within me as I thought about how they’d made those bright, kind children feel.

“Lady Witch, you’re pretty angry.”

“Absolutely *livid*. I want to char their bones.”

The tied-up thugs shook once more as my mana leaked out again, but I was already done paying them any mind.

“If they’re in the basement and the door isn’t open, then all I need to do is make another one. *Whisper*.” If the wind could reach the kids and let me hear them, then I should have been able to make them hear me too. “Ah, ah, mic test. Mic test. Danny-boy, can you hear me?”

“Big Sis Chise?! Where...where are you?!”

“Right above the basement you’re in. I’m gonna save you guys, so can you get everyone to move to the corner?”

“G-got it!”

I used the spell *Earth Sonar* to send waves of mana throughout the ground, confirming the layout of the room below me. Since the kids were all huddled off in a corner, we were in the clear.

“Okay, Teto, let’s go.”

“Okay!”

“Wait, girls, what are you—?”

“—*HOLE!*”

“Huh?!”

Teto and I put our hands to the floor in unison, changing the structure of the ground. With a strange popping sound, a huge hole

opened up that we could use to lower down to the room the kids were in.

“Okay, we’ll be going down. You guys keep an eye on the thugs.”

“Teto and Lady Witch are saving the kids!”

“What, are you serious?!”

Teto and I linked hands and jumped into the hole. As my flight spell softened our fall, I saw that they were in a dimly lit sweatshop set up in an isolation cell.

“We’ve come to save you guys, Danny-boy!”

“We’re here! Everyone’s worried, so let’s get you kids home!”

“Big Sis Chise, Teto...”

As light streamed into the dim room through the huge hole I’d opened in the ceiling, the kids clung to each other in the corner. As soon as they registered that it was us who’d flown down, they ran up to us, nerves breaking. The children who’d been holding back their tears and fears broke down into sobs of relief seeing Teto and I, their absolute protectors, coming for them.

The kids who’d been taken were five of the potion and papermaking team, plus three of the littler kids. Teto and I gave each of them a big hug to calm them down. They’d been punched and battered when the thugs kidnapped them, so I healed them all.

Once they were a little bit calmer, I suggested we leave.

“Let’s head back to the orphanage.”

“Wait, Big Sis. There are people other than us locked up down here too.”

I fretted a bit at Dan’s words. The kids had been kidnapped, and Arsus and his adventuring party had upstairs handled. Soon, soldiers and other adventurers would come to help and get the whole kidnapping situation under control. Then the other people would be saved anyway.

But—

“Okay. But make sure you stay right beside us, all right?” I said, checking out how the room was laid out. The magic door couldn’t be opened from inside, and though the walls were thick, they weren’t unbreakable. “*Hole!*”

Ignoring the doors going upstairs, I made more holes in the walls. Each isolation cell had a breadth of captives, ranging from children to adults, and I let them all out.

“Now, let’s get back up to the surface.”

As I pulled roughly twenty people out, a crowd was already forming inside the warehouse. We left dealing with the aftermath to the guards and the adventurer’s guildmaster, and Teto and I brought the kids back to the orphanage.

Chapter 23: Staying the Night at the Orphanage

After we saved the children, the knights took charge of the kidnappers' other victims. Though the whole situation had only lasted a short while, it terrified the kids. After we spoke to Father Paulo, we decided we'd spend the night with them all in the orphanage.

"Okay. It'll be hard making breakfast for the lot of them, but let's do it."

"Lady Witch! Teto will help!"

The morning after the incident, Teto and I made breakfast by ourselves, to let as many kids as possible sleep in.

"We're late! We need to get breakfast made, fast!"

Danny-boy and the other kids ran into the dining hall in a rush, awoken by the smell of food.

"Oh, don't panic. We've already got it made. And we were speaking to Father Paulo, and it's been decided that you guys'll take a break from making potions and paper for a bit. You could've slept in a little longer..."

"Huh? ...A break?"

I gave them a troubled smile. "Yeah, a break. You went through something horrible, after all. Now relax, eat your breakfast, and then go do whatever you feel like doing."

"We made tons of food!"

When Teto dished out their breakfast, Dan and the other kids ate their food with an air of disquiet.

They'd be staying in all day—it was way too soon for them to be out in public again. Because of that, they weren't going out collecting herbs, or picking up sawdust for paper, or making any potions or sheets, and they got to spend the day doing whatever they wanted.

"We're going outside!"

"Big Sis Chise, we'll just be in the yard!"

"Just make sure you don't get hurt. I'll be staying inside."

Teto took the more energetic kids (including Danny-boy) out to play in the snow outside in the orphanage's yard. As I saw them off, one little girl clung to my robe tightly, coughing a little.

"Big Sis..."

"Let's just stay inside, together."

The kids who were still badly shook up would be indoors for the

day; I'd chosen to stay in for their sake. Of those kids, one of the older girls came to me with a question.

"Big Sis, there was something I wanted to ask you. Is that okay?"

"Sure. What's up?"

"I was actually just wondering if there was anything we could do with the paper that gets ripped when we're pulling it off of the boards."

There were lots of sheets that, upon pulling them off of the boards they dried on, either ripped and couldn't be sold, or had been made too thick and hard.

"Let's see... We could use the concoction made from Green Slimes to redissolve it and make the paper again, but..."

"That's what I figured," the girl said disappointedly.

Looking at her, I picked up a few failed sheets. "At this size, though, there are some other things we can use them for," I said, closing my eyes to think up a clear mental image of what I wanted before using my Cartography skill to draw a blueprint out on the paper.

"What are you doing, Sis?"

"I'm making a pattern for a stuffed toy. I thought that paper like this might be good to use for patterns."

I had no idea that the Cartography skill I'd gained from drawing maps during our dungeon runs could be used to draw out sewing patterns for stuffed toys too.

"You can make stuffed toys with it...?"

At my words, another bunch of children who were inside gathered around me, looking on in interest.

I drew out each part of the toy on paper, then used scissors to cut them all out. I'd drawn the pattern at double the actual size, taking the fact that parts of it would need to be sewn together, then I would use the pattern to cut the cloth, then sew it all up to make a stuffed toy.

"Okay, cloth, stuffing, then we need a needle and thread, so... Ah, there they are."

I pulled the sewing set I'd used when fixing the pioneer village adventurer's clothes up out of my magic bag. The cloth and stuffing I was going to use were from the things we'd bartered for or been given as thanks for defeating monsters in villages and towns we'd stopped in on our way to Dungeon City. The fabric we'd picked up was a very unpopular shade of brown, and I smiled wryly as I remembered how they'd clearly just pushed their unsellable stock on us. The stuffing was wool we'd received from a village of sheep farmers after we saved their flock from monsters. Back then, they'd told us all about how to use wool and some things to watch out for.

“Now we put the pattern on the cloth and draw out the lines.”

“I-I’ll help!”

“Me too, me too!”

After I demonstrated, a number of girls volunteered to help.

“Okay then. Let’s split things up.”

I left making the other parts up to the volunteers. They were used to sewing, since they fixed up kids’ clothing in the orphanage anyway, and had great recall. Then I sewed several pieces of cloth together, turned them inside out, and stuffed them with wool until they were puffed out.

“Arms and legs!”

That was all that was needed to make the toy’s limbs, and the kids all took turns touching the squishy wool-stuffed bits.

Once I finished the torso I was currently working on, all of the parts were ready.

“Torso done. Now, we just need to sew up the other limbs and the head, then use some stronger embroidery thread and buttons to attach them all to each other.”

“We’ve got lots of buttons! I’ll go get them!”

It seemed they’d kept the buttons that happened to come off of the children’s clothes. There were tons of different types: wooden ones made from wood from the dungeon, brass ones, leather ones... Since I was making a stuffed toy, I used softer ones, two little wooden buttons for the eyes, and leather buttons to hold the limbs on. Then, I used strong embroidery thread to sew all the parts together, completing the toy.

“Ah, it’s a bear!”

The children all cried out happily when they saw the deformed finished bear. Since it was our first try, it wasn’t all that well balanced, but it was soft and squishy, and somehow a little bit cute.

I squished the bear, moving its arms and legs around a little.

“So Sis can smile like that...”

“She must like cute things.”

“Or maybe she likes soft things?”

“I always thought Chise was a pretty girl, but she’s super cute when she smiles.”

When I noticed the kids chattering about me after I got a bit lost in squeezing the bear, I quickly composed myself. But seeing all of the kids smiling at me set my cheeks alight from embarrassment.

“I was only checking to make sure it wasn’t too hard...” I tried to excuse myself, only getting warm looks back. I might’ve looked like I was around their age, but inside I was an adult. I didn’t want them teasing me.

After taking a few deep breaths, I held out the bear to the little

girl who'd been clinging nervously to me the whole time.

"Here you go."

"Huh? I can have it?"

She'd been all worked up because of the kidnapping incident, but at some point in making the bear she'd forgotten all about her fear, her eyes sparkling brighter and brighter as we finished making the toy.

"Cough, cough... Thank you, Big Sis!"

"Yep. Make sure to take good care of it with everyone."

"I'm so jealous!"

"Let me see it!"

"Lemme touch it~!"

"Big Sissies, make more toys!"

The girl I'd given the bear left my side and was quickly surrounded, with everyone taking turns to touch it.

"Stuffed toys are so nice."

"I have more supplies, so if everyone works together, you can make more friends for it."

"Okay! Let's make them!"

The inside kids made more patterns, then used the leftover cloth and stuffing to make more bears.

"Lady Witch~, we're back!"

"Uuurrh, it's cold! Big Sis Chise, it's really cold outside!"

A while later, the children who'd been playing outside with Teto came back in, only for their eyes to widen in surprise when they saw the finished bear and the other toys partway made.

"Welcome back, Teto. You all must be cold, playing outside for so long. I'll ready the baths."

"Please do!"

With the kids all back in, the room instantly got livelier.

When night came, one of the older children suggested that we bring mattresses and blankets into the biggest room and all sleep together, to comfort the kids who were still nervous. If we were all snuggled up together, the winter air would be less of a bother, and it'd be harder for kids to get scared if there were more people. The only issues we ran into were that some of the kids were restless sleepers and kicked others, or the ones who tried to get up at night to go to the bathroom stepped on people. Other than that, everyone was able to rest safely.

The little girl who'd been clinging to me most of the day was now hugging her bear, sleeping softly surrounded by her orphan siblings.

But sometimes through the night, the coughs of a number of children echoed around the room.

Chapter 24: Anode Fever

A morning a few days after the kidnapping incident, when the stuff being handled by the adults like Father Paulo was beginning to calm down, Dan came barreling into the dining hall.

“Big Sis Chise, Teto! Big trouble! The littler kids have fevers!”

“Fevers? Okay. I’ll go check up on them, so you finish readying breakfast, Teto.”

“Got it!”

The room Dan led me to was the large room where we’d all slept snuggled up together to comfort the kids who were still emotionally unstable after the incident.

“Cough, cough... Big Bro, Big Sis Chise...”

“Cough... Cough... Sorry we couldn’t help.”

“Sick children shouldn’t worry about anything. Let me have a look at you.”

Putting a hand to their foreheads, they were all quite hot. Between that, the sore throats, and the cough, I was inclined to think it was a cold.

“Is this because they tuckered themselves out so badly? Let’s see if a little diagnostic spell won’t do the trick.”

I also felt some weird mana movement when they coughed, so I used *Search*, which would let me check their bodies in depth internally and target my healing spells more precisely. The spell revealed that their bodies were teeming with microscopic, foreign-seeming mana.

“Huh? What is this?”

“Big Sis, how are they...?”

I didn’t answer Dan’s question; I was too busy cycling through every healing skill I had.

“*Heal*... No, that’s wrong.”

When I cast healing magic while focusing on the lungs, the foreign mana squirmed, sucking up the mana from the spell and multiplying. At the same time, the magic strengthened their natural immunity, which destroyed the newer foreign mana and returned them to their condition at the start of this whole mess. My Mana Perception revealed that the foreign mana that was in their lungs was also flying around the room. Finally, I used the appraisal magic I’d learned from the church’s grimoire on the children, and...

Status: Anode Fever (Onset)

“This is...”

“Bro! I brought Father Paulo!”

“I was told the children have a fever. How are they, Lady Chise?”

Apparently the other children had called for the priest.

“I just appraised the kids, and it read that they have something called Anode Fever.”

“Anode Fever. I see. Let’s get the uninfected children into another room. The infected ones will need to be quarantined in the church.”

Every second we spent breathing the same air as these kids put us at risk of contamination with foreign mana—more accurately, with a mana-bearing viral load.

“*Clean!*”

Father Paulo sterilized the room and everyone inside, and the Anode Fever virus ended up popping when trying to absorb the mana from the spell, disappearing. I myself had breathed in the virus, but it destroyed itself trying to suck up my abundant mana. Just in case, I put a barrier around myself to keep it out.

“Lady Chise, might I ask you to help me move the children?”

“Yes, of course. *Psychokinesis!*”

I used psychokinetic magic to lift the limp children up into the air, still wrapped in their blankets, and carry them to the church. While we were moving, I surrounded us with a barrier, and put another one up in the room we arrived in to keep the virus from getting out.

“Anode Fever is contagious, Father?”

“Yes. Its main symptoms are a high fever and a cough. It’s mostly children with little mana who fall ill.”

“How did they catch it? Where could they have been infected?”

“Word had come my way not long ago that one of the doctors present for the rescue you conducted recognized the infection in one of the other prisoners.”

The captives must have had compromised immune systems from the poor conditions. They were infected with the virus, it had spread and infected the children when everyone had been saved, and after a few days of incubation, now we were dealing with the symptoms. There was also a chance that some had caught it from other children while we all slept cuddled together.

All sorts of factors just snowballed. If I had just left the other prisoners to the soldiers and other adventurers, the kids might not have been infected...

“Lady Chise, you mustn’t blame yourself. No one could stop this.”

“Father... How is it cured?”

“Healing magic does almost nothing to it, and there are key ingredients that make medicinal solutions prohibitively expensive. Luckily, it isn’t terribly contagious, and once someone has had it once,

it's very hard to catch a second time. Let's believe in the children," Father Paulo said, trying to cheer me up.

"I understand. I'll go make some gruel for the children with fevers—something unchallenging."

"Yes, please do. I will go ask the children who have already had Anode Fever before if they could help take care of the infected children."

And so, the two of us split up to tend to both the orphanage and the infected kids. The ones who'd had it before helped both of us, while we left the other children to Teto and the older kids, hoping they could go on like normal.

One of the children helping take care of the infected ones was Dan.

"You've had it before, Danny-boy?" I asked him as he helped me carry the gruel—a simple wheat-flour paste flavored with sugar and salt.

"Yeah, winter, the year before last! I had an awful sore throat for a week, and eating was hard. Granted, that had more to do with the gruel than my throat..." he recalled. His good humor felt affected—like it was keeping some darker feeling battened down.

After we fed the feverish children their gruel, we had them drink some hot water to keep them hydrated, wiping their sweat off with a towel and using leather canteens of water to cool their foreheads. The hot water had a little bit of potion mixed in, to try to restore the stamina they'd lost from the fever.

Once all that was finished, all we could do was watch over them, just as Father Paulo said. As we did, Dan looked at me pleadingly.

"Hey, Big Sis, is there anything else I could do for them?"

"Thank you, Danny-boy. There's nothing we can do right now. But you must be tired. Resting is part of your job here, you know."

He'd been running around since the kidnapping incident, so he must have been tired. When I pointed it out, his forced cheerfulness disappeared, tears forming in his eyes.

"I told you I was infected before, but back then, two other kids who were infected at the same time died."

"...I see."

"So I want to do anything I can. Until you guys saved us, I couldn't afford to think about it at all, but...I'm scared that the little kids might die..."

As he let it all out, all I could do was quietly nod along. Once he was done saying what he needed to say, he wiped his tears with his sleeve, putting his usual smile back on his face.

"Sorry, Big Sis Chise! This is exactly the time I should be acting normal for the little ones, isn't it? I'm gonna make potions, earn

money, and feed the sick kids something good!”

“All right, I’ll see you then. I’ll keep watch over the children.”

Dan, having shaken off his worries on his own, headed to the potion lab behind the orphanage, and Father Paulo came in to take his place.

“Children grow up so fast.”

“You were listening, Father?”

“Yes. Before, it took all he had to live in the present. But now he can see tomorrow. That is all because of you, Lady Chise.”

“That’s because Danny-boy himself is working so hard.”

The two of us watched him go, squinting in the brightness of his growth.

“Allow me to take over for you. You should rest yourself.”

“No, I’m o— All right. Thank you for worrying about me. I’ll take a little break.”

The children sleeping in the beds coughed unconsciously, filling the air with yet more viral cells. I used *Clean* on the whole room to wipe them out before leaving the children to Father Paulo.

“Ah, Lady Witch. Are you having a break too?”

“Teto. Thank you for taking care of the kids. How are they?”

“They’re all good kids~,” Teto said, reheating the food I’d forgotten to eat that morning in all the fuss for me.

After I finished eating and had a moment to breathe, I pulled my mixology recipe book and my herb encyclopedia from my magic bag.

“What are you looking for, Lady Witch?”

“I want to lessen the risk that the children will die from Anode Fever.”

“Then Teto will help you look!”

“Thank you, Teto.”

We both sat down at the dining table, splitting up to research the illness.

“Healing magic doesn’t do much to it, but this... Yeah, this.”

I found a description of a medicine for Anode Fever in one of the books I owned.

Chapter 25: Henea Potion, the Mana Absorption Resistance Medicine

Having found a medicine that worked against the contagious Anode Fever, I made sure that we could make it ourselves. Then, with that confidence, I told Teto my thoughts to get them straight.

“Teto. I’m going to make a medicine that works against Anode Fever—henea potion.”

“What kind of medicine is that, Lady Witch?” Teto asked. It felt right, and it helped me collect my thoughts. Her simple thought patterns and questions always gave me the perspective I needed to break out of a stifling mindset.

“Henea potion is a type of medicine that heightens the respiratory system’s resistance to mana absorption.”

The Anode Fever’s virus sucked up the victim’s mana and nutrients to multiply. Though it would be overloaded and destroy itself in the case that the infected had a large health or mana pool, any healing magic from outside of the body wouldn’t be strong enough to make it destroy itself, instead helping it multiply.

Henea potion was usually used to raise one’s resistance to mana absorption by monsters or traps, and would stop the virus from being able to absorb the mana necessary to multiply. Plus, its ingredients would also have the secondary effect of suppressing the fever and throat inflammation that Anode Fever was known for.

“Huh~! So there was a medicine like that!”

“So I was thinking I could teach Danny-boy and the other kids how to make it.”

“Hm? Why not just make it yourself? Or if you wanted to cure the virus, why not just use your Creation Magic to make it?”

Teto always shot back with the whys. It was true that it was a roundabout method, and when I thought of the children suffering from the fever and cough, I wanted them to take it ASAP. But—

“Teto. I found the location of the Wasteland of Nothingness, the aim of our journey. So we’ll be leaving Dungeon City eventually.”

“We always do that. Teto and Lady Witch always travel.”

“That’s why I’m teaching them. That way, once we’re gone, hopefully they’ll be able to stop other little kids from dying to Anode Fever next winter.”

While I was here, it was okay for them to fail as many times as

they had to. As long as I had the mana for it, I could keep making the necessary ingredients with my Creation Magic. I had just recently given them the tools to live for today and the future. Next, I wanted to give them the knowledge and methods to save other people.

“I don’t think you’re wrong, Lady Witch! Let’s go ask Father Paulo!”

“Yeah, let’s.”

The two of us took off.

“Father, do you have a moment?”

“Yes. What is it, ladies?”

Father Paulo checked on the children through the crack in the door as he came outside to speak to us.

“I’d like to speak to you about how to treat the children’s Anode Fever...”

“Our current makeshift solutions will cut it for now, but...”

He must have known what we were about to ask; I could already tell he was feeling some consternation about the potential expense of what we were about to undertake. I asked him anyway.

“I’d like permission to mix and use henea potion on them.”

“The medication and its ingredients are extremely costly. Though our orphanage has more money than it did before, we cannot afford to buy enough medicinal ingredients to give it to every child who is currently sick.”

“I happen to have the necessary ingredients on hand. I’d also like to teach Dan and the others how to make it, Father.”

“Teto is asking too!”

Both of us begged, and he closed his eyes before giving us a troubled smile.

“Truly, the two of you seem to think of nothing but noble deeds. To do all this out of your own pocket—to go so far as to pass down your skills to my wards... I should be the one asking you,” he said, an earnest look settling on his face as he bowed deeply. “Please, teach Dan and the children how to save the others.”

“Father, don’t bow to us! We’re only doing what we want!”

“Lady Witch is bashful, so that bothers her.”

“Hey, Teto! Don’t say that!”

As I softly scolded Teto, Father Paulo straightened up and laughed.

“All right. I’ll watch the ill children. Please take care of the medicine.”

“Thank you so much. Let’s go, Teto.”

“Okay!”

I took Teto and headed to the mixology building behind the orphanage.

“Everyone, can I talk to you for a second?”

“Lady Witch has something she wants to ask you!”

“Big Sis Chise, Teto, what’s up?”

Starting with Dan, all of the children working in the building looked towards us. I saw that they were just cleaning. They hadn’t had a chance to go collect the herbs necessary for potions or the wood trash they’d need to make paper due to the children who had fallen sick that morning.

“Want to all work for me today? I’ll give you each a silver piece for the whole day.”

“You want us to do something? Of course we will!”

I gave them a wry smile, having hoped they’d at least ask what kind of job it was, before pulling a bag of empty mana crystals from my magic bag.

“I want your help to make a certain medicine. Kids who can brew potions will make it with me, while I want the rest of you to pour your mana into this mana crystal to give the brewers enough mana to make it.”

I passed an empty mana crystal to Teto, and the kids on charging duty hopped to it. Since Father Paulo had taught them magic for daily life, they each took turns putting their mana in it before passing it to the next child.

“Okay, Danny-boy and everyone else, you help me make the medicine.”

I pulled the Roniseras vines out of my magic bag, thinking back to Sayah, the herbalist who we’d met in the village we stopped in to see the ruins. It seemed like an odd twist of fate that the vine we’d picked and dried with her would come in handy now.

“...What’s wrong, Big Sis?”

“Nothing. Can you carry these?”

I continued to pull things out of my magic bag: the ingredients for mana potions, the mandragora I’d found in the forest zones of the dungeon, and small earth magic stones. As an aside, magic stones weren’t bad for you if you put them in your mouth like Teto did, but they didn’t have any effect either. One of the most basic practical uses for them was as a medicinal reagent; crushed into powder and mixed into most magical medicines, they improved their bioavailability.

“We’re going to mix this in a pot, add mana, and make a mana absorption resistance medicine called a henea potion.”

“How much should we put in?”

I’d given each of the potion-making children a measuring cup and scales I’d made with Creation Magic, and a handwritten book by Teto and I on mixology. All of the recipes inside had concrete measurements, so the children had come to naturally worry about

exact amounts.

“That, I don’t know. This is my first time making it, so I want you guys to help.”

The ingredients for the medicine had been recorded in one of the books I owned, but mixologists worked with their own personal measurements, or by feel and experience.

“I’d like for you all to figure out how much of everything we need to make it. I’ll provide all the ingredients, and I’ll appraise the finished products to figure out which one works.”

“Oh, so it’s like that! Okay, guys, let’s split everything up!”

“Yeah!”

The potion-making kids were all fired up for their first time doing something like this. But they then realized they had no idea exactly *how* to figure out a recipe, so their enthusiasm faltered a little.

“Let’s all split up and make the potions,” I said, pulling out some paper and drawing vertical and horizontal lines on it. Then I wrote out the various possible patterns of water and ingredient amounts, the order in which they were added, and the mana necessary to make it. “Everyone will try these amounts. Then we’ll pick the most effective one and gradually adjust the recipe!”

“Okay, again, let’s go, guys!”

And so, the children and I started making the Henea medicine together. Each group took to brewing their formulation with an uncharacteristic focus and gravitas.

“Ah! Big Sis Chise, I messed up!”

“It’s fine. We still have ingredients,” I said, pretending to carry out firewood for the stoves. I’d actually used Creation Magic to make more of it and the ingredients for the medicine, while also filling the mana crystal the children had put their mana in with more of mine.

Like that, we gradually identified the ideal ratio.

“Mid-quality henea potion takes twenty grams of Roniseras vine, ten grams of mana grass, five grams of sap squeezed from a mandragora, two hundred milliliters of water, and three grams of magic stone powder. It requires more than 500 MP.”

“Heh heh, how’s that, Big Sis Chise?!”

They hadn’t been using their own mana, but pulling mana from the mana crystal still tuckered them all out. They all smiled weakly at me, but they made sure to write the finished recipe in the blank pages of their mixology books.

The medicine was made, and the kids had learned the recipe—that was enough.

“Good work. Here’s everyone’s pay. Would you be able to bring the finished medicine to Father Paulo for me?”

“The father? Ah, sure!”

After I gave each child who'd helped their one silver and Danny-boy brought the finished henea potions to Father Paulo, the kids suffering from Anode Fever would be saved. And after helping the other children clean up the building, I borrowed the facility myself to make something.

“Whew, done.”

I'd made a higher-ranked mana absorption resistance henelore potion by mixing the necessary ingredients for a henea potion with a few drops of land dragon blood. The henelore potion, made with 3000 MP, was of the highest quality. The land dragon blood amplified its healing effect, leaving me with five doses worth, meaning that if, by chance, the henea potions the children had made didn't work, I would be able to use it on the sick kids.

But luckily, Dan and the other children's work did the trick; the sick kids' fevers had gone down by the next day, and they were able to eat properly. Three days later, their Anode Fever was gone, and they were well enough to run around playing outside.

Chapter 26: The Dungeon Stampede

“Hey, Chise! Long time no see!”

“Long time no see!”

“Yes, Arsus, it has been a while. How are you?”

Teto and I spent two weeks after the kidnapping incident at the orphanage with the children. Things had been chaotic, but two weeks was definitely long enough for things to quiet down.

Today, we were finally able to come back to the apartment we’d rented. As we did, we met Arsus and his Swords of Daybreak, who were renting in the same building.

“The incident involved adventurers. The guild couldn’t leave things unsettled, so we were handling the normal fallout. We’re pooped!”

We invited them all into our apartment and asked them about the details. It turned out that the company who owned the warehouse had orchestrated the kidnapping. They were an unscrupulous bunch, employing delinquent adventurers under the table to prop up their criminal enterprises. Kidnapping, obstruction of business, illegal slave trading, assassinating troublesome people inside the dungeon, et cetera. The plan had been to commission the handful of crooked local guardsmen to help relocate the orphans under cover of night to a village the company had a hold on, where they could be put to work in their own potion-brewing and paper mill operations. Our speedy rescue had brought their crimes to light one after the other.

“So in the end, the culprits were sentenced to hard labor and sent to the mines. Other than that, we had to crush the company and seize all their assets. They needed to show the people who might target the children in the future what would happen to them if they did, after all,” Lena the mage added after Arsus’s explanation.

The other prisoners were being taken care of by the lord, and the delinquent adventurers were stripped of their licenses and sold into slavery.

“But it really sucks that your B-rank exam got delayed,” Arsus muttered once we were finished talking about the incident.

In order to save the children, we’d abandoned the exam to rise to B-rank. Whatever the reason had been, it would probably be a good while until we had another chance to take it.

“We don’t really care about it anyway. We were only taking it

because we could.”

I only thought of higher ranks as a handy side benefit, so it really wasn't any problem for us if we put it off.

“You threw away your shot so you could put an end to a mess that was at least partially the guild's responsibility; the guildmaster is apparently planning on arranging things so that we'll be judging your participation in the Dungeon Stampede as an impromptu B-rank exam.”

“Stampede? You mean that thing that happens when monsters pour out from a dungeon?” I asked, tilting my head.

“Yeah, that. Normally, killing a fixed number of monsters from each floor stops 'em from getting out, but every year at the end of the winter, tons of monsters appear inside the dungeon. It's a Dungeon City seasonal tradition that we deal with the overflow.”

The Dungeon Stampede that happened at the end of winter was both the most dangerous and most profitable event in an adventurer's career. It lasted about three days, and holding up against the mass of monsters' attacks required various technical skills on the part of the adventurers.

“Spending three days down there on the front lines without coming back once is a lot more difficult than the exam we were gonna give you, and you'll be under scrutiny by the other B- and C-rank adventurers. There'll be a bunch of other high-ranked adventurers who're participating in the stampede acting as examiners too.”

“So if we do a good job in front of everyone there, we'll rise up to B-rank?”

“Yeah, pretty much. There's precedent for it, so long as the examinees put in an exceptional performance.”

As I nodded in understanding and thought to myself, Arsus spoke again.

“Plus, we helped you with the kidnapping incident, right? Think of participating in the stampede as paying us back. We need as many skilled adventurers as we can get!” he said, begging us with a smirk.

“What do you want to do, Lady Witch?”

“Adventurers of a certain skill level are probably forced to participate anyway, and even if it's going to be judged strictly in place of an exam, there are no demerits for us if we fail, so it should be fine.”

We'd just be doing our jobs. Even if we didn't go up to B-rank, everything would be fine as long as we held the stampede back.

Arsus gave me a smirk. “I'll be lookin' forward to the day, then.”

“We'll do the best we can, anyway.”

“Teto will try hard with Lady Witch!”

Once we were finished talking to Arsus and his party, we spent

the rest of the time until the stampede began doing adventurer work as usual. We explored the floors past the twenty-first, earned money, and stowed excess mana away in mana crystals. Our days off were spent with the orphans, making cookies with them to eat while we were down in the dungeon, or asking Father Paulo for advice on the spells written in the Church's grimoire. Other than that, I checked the quality of the potions the kids brewed, and we secretly dealt with the dumbasses who dared try anything with the orphanage.

Thanks to all of that, between rebuilding the orphanage and my merciless punishment of those who threatened it, I ended up becoming known as the Black Saintess. It still seems like a wholly inappropriate title for a witch, if you ask me.

And so, through the winter, Teto and I had become stronger.

NAME: Chise (Reincarnator)

CLASS: Witch

TITLE: Goddess of the Pioneer Village, C-Rank Adventurer, Black Saintess

LEVEL: 75

HP: 1,800/1,800

MP: 21,200/21,200

SKILLS: Staff Martial Arts Lv 3, Origin Magic Lv 7, Body Strengthening Lv 5, Mixing Lv 4, Mana Regeneration Lv 5, Mana Control Lv 7, Mana Isolation Lv 6, various others...

UNIQUE SKILLS: Creation Magic, Slowed Aging

NAME: Teto (Earthnoid)

CLASS: Guardian Swordswoman

TITLE: Witch's Follower, C Rank Adventurer

GOLEM CORE MANA: 45,100/45,000

SKILLS: Swordsmanship Lv 6, Shield Proficiency Lv 3, Earth Magic Lv 6, Monstrous Strength Lv 4, Mana Regeneration Lv 3, Subordinate Strengthening Lv 3, Body Strengthening Lv 10, Regeneration Lv 3, various others...

Thanks to leveling up in the dungeon by fighting monsters and eating strange fruit, my mana pool had grown to more than 20,000 MP. Teto had absorbed the magic stones the monsters dropped, raising her Golem Core Mana and achieving Body Strengthening Lv 10.

We'd defeated a lot of monsters over the winter. We especially farmed the B-rank gatekeeper land dragon for a good while, but we didn't actually level as much as I thought we would. Apparently the

average dungeon-born monster trends considerably younger due to the higher rate of death and replacement, meaning they have less experience than the typical battle-hardened surface monster. I learned this from Liriel, who I spoke with every once in a while during a Dream Oracle.

“So why do dungeons exist in this world, anyway?”

“They are a mechanism of the world releasing the mana accumulated in the leylines.”

“A mechanism?”

“I believe I told you before that the world’s mana had run dry because of the precursors’ rampant abuse, and that mana flowing from locations where it is dense to those where there is little is one of its properties. But that is only one side of mana.”

“What do you mean?”

“While mana tends to spread, it also tends to clot with other mana.”

Because of this, though there were areas dense with mana and those that were sparse with it, the worldwide average density was still low.

“Those mana deviations around the world—better yet, let’s call them mana clots—tend to cause disasters.”

If a mana pile came into being on the surface, things nearby could mutate into strong monsters, or it could trigger a monster stampede.

“Dungeons exist to solve the mana pile issue by using a moderate amount of any given pile’s mana and spreading it.”

“So basically, dungeons occur in places where mana continuously collects and act as a spot for it to bleed off. They’re sort of like volcanoes, huh?”

“Your knowledge is fairly accurate. Volcanoes also release a large amount of mana into the air with the magma as they erupt,” Liriel said, giggling at my comparison before continuing. “Dungeons use the accumulated leyline mana to create treasure chests as bait, and by bringing the magic stones from monsters born inside the dungeon outside of it, the accumulated mana spreads.”

“But why can’t the mana just erupt naturally? And is it really okay to use mana to make treasure? There’s a mana drought, isn’t there?”

While I thought that there was no need for such a roundabout method, Liriel shook her head.

“If the mana erupted naturally, it would only form a mana pile on the surface instead, defeating the purpose. And while we have a mana drought, our star is still creating mana. It’s best to gradually diffuse the mana that it creates by turning it into treasure through the dungeon’s creation abilities, or turning it into magic stones.”

So summing it up, the world was set up so its total mana would increase. I think I basically agreed with her conclusion that it was the ideal solution, since dungeons existed to make humans stronger. The stronger a human got by leveling up, the larger their mana pool would grow, and with it, their natural mana bleed. In the end, the mana on our continent had very gradually increased since two thousand years ago.

“But when a leyline can’t hold back anymore, it forcefully births monsters with its mana to regulate it in the form of a stampede.”

“I see. Then should we not clear dungeons?”

“You should. Bringing the dungeon core from the deepest depths to the surface takes a large burden off of the leyline, so I would actually recommend it.”

As an aside, magic stones and mana crystals had very distinct differences. Crystallized mana itself became magic stones, while minerals such as crystals that transformed via mana to gain mana-storing properties were classified as mana crystals.

“Ah, it’s just about time. Let us speak again sometime.”

“Okay, see you.”

And so, my Dream Oracle with the Goddess Liriel ended.

By speaking with Liriel within my dreams like that, I gradually accumulated more knowledge. Teto and I spent some very fruitful days as we waited for the Dungeon Stampede, and we had come to the guild on that day to go down and earn some money.

But that day, the guard who should have been guarding the dungeon’s entrance rushed into the guild.

“There have been reports of monsters that shouldn’t be on lower levels appearing there! It’s an omen of the stampede!”

Dungeon City’s annual tradition had come a little early.

Chapter 27: Stampede Defensive Battle

“...So how should we be moving with this stampede?”

“Lemme think... For now, just stay on standby in the guild.”

Having received reports about the stampede, the adventurer’s guild immediately barred the entrance and ordered all adventurers to be on the alert. Teto and I stayed with Arsus and his crew, who were also waiting.

“The stampede is here. If you can get through this, your dreams of rising to B-rank may come true. Are you two feeling the pressure?”

“No, not at all. What about you, Teto?”

“Teto’s not afraid of anything as long as she’s with Lady Witch!”

Laughing dryly at our answers, he gave us a rundown of how we’d be dealing with the stampede within the dungeon. Since, luckily, the city’s dungeon’s upper floors were plains-type, if we kept control of the areas around the stairs between each floor and blocked the monsters’ paths to the surface, we’d be able to keep the city safe from their attacks.

While we listened to Arsus tell us stories of past stampedes, the guildmaster arrived.

“According to our scouts, monsters from lower levels are appearing on the tenth floor! We can’t let them get out into the city! We’ll set up our defensive line on the sixth floor and intercept them!”

Then, higher-ranked adventurers each took lower-ranked teams and headed to the dungeon.

“Follow us, girls! Everyone above B-rank, we’re heading to the front lines!”

“All right. Thank you.”

Though I nodded at Arsus as he spoke amusedly, the other B-rank adventurers gave us worried glances. I looked like a kid, and they were probably worried about two young girls on their own. But they also knew that we’d been farming land dragons daily, so they might’ve been confused about the gap between our appearances and our actual skills.

“Chise and Teto here are C-rank, but they’re probably more powerful than B-ranks, so don’t worry about a thing! Let’s go!” Arsus declared to everyone around us as he led us to the very first line.

As we stepped on the teleporter and warped to the defensive line

on the sixth floor, there were already monsters from lower floors appearing there.

“We’re gonna blockade the stairs going to the surface! Then we defend against the monsters that’ve gathered!”

The Swords of Daybreak took the lead, giving everyone their roles. Making a base with magic, scouting parties, defeating any monsters they laid eyes on... It really looked like the swords were used to the job.

“What should we do?”

“Chise, you’re on standby to conserve your mana. Teto, you go help the earth mages make the base!”

“Roger!”

While Teto went off and joined the base-creation efforts, I was a little put off by being told to stay on standby.

“It’s rough having nothing to do.”

“Don’t worry about it. The yearly stampede is a war of attrition. We’ll be fighting for three days straight.”

The scale of a dungeon’s stampede was based on the amount of mana that had built up in the leylines. Some ended in half a day, while there were reports of ones that kept spitting out monsters for a whole month and destroyed a whole country. Right now, despite the fact that we were nearly done clearing out the monsters we could currently see, there were even more coming up from the depths.

“Oh yeah. Chise, when you told us about the magic you could use before, you mentioned healing magic.”

“Yeah, I did.”

“Then it’s time for you to work for your keep!”

As he said that, people started gathering at the teleportation circle. It seemed they’d gotten caught in the stampede while dungeon-diving, and were wounded by monsters that were stronger than what they’d usually see. They were also carrying in some wounded woodcutters from the forest levels.

“This is your first job. Get at it!”

“I’ll be off then.”

With that, I headed towards the wounded. They’d done some basic first aid, but some were still bleeding or had broken limbs.

“It’s okay. I’ll fix you up right away. *Area Heal!*”

They were all grouped up, so I used an AOE heal. The ones who weren’t healed in one shot or were poisoned got some extra single-target heals.

“I’m done now.”

“We’re saved! Thanks for healing us!”

After each of them gave me a little bow and some thanks, they evacuated the dungeon. As I watched them all go, Arsus, who’d been

watching, came up to me.

“I finished healing everyone. What should I do next?”

“You overdid it, Chise.” Arsus scolded me, rubbing his temples. “Those guys weren’t part of the fighting force. Instead of healing them fully, you should’ve just fixed ’em up to the point where they could get back to the surface. You only have so much mana.”

“I see. I did it out of habit; when I saw how pained they looked...”

While my mana pool had grown to over 20,000, it was true that I still had a finite stock, and we’d be defending against the stampede for a long time. It was a bit painful to think about how I’d have to prioritize who to heal and how much.

“Er, uh. Just watch out from now on. How’s your mana?”

“I’m still fine. I’ll have a break when I hit ninety percent.”

Though I’d used healing magic, I was able to lower the mana cost significantly thanks to my anatomical knowledge from my past life, so I barely used any MP.

“Seriously? You seriously did *all of that*, and you’re still fine... Okay. Got it. Then next—”

Five hours passed. While adventurers dealt with the monsters pouring out from lower floors, I stood on the simple fort walls that’d been built with earth magic and shot off spells.

“*Wind Cutter!*”

Sweeping my staff, I slaughtered the monsters approaching the walls with countless blades of wind.

“Whew... I’m gonna take a break.”

“All right. Leave the rest to us! *Burst Flare!*”

“Go! *Element Arrow!*”

The female mage Lena and the Spirit Magic-user elf Raphilia cut through swathes of monsters with bursts of magic and a hail of charmed arrows. I had a larger mana pool than either of them, but they were much better at managing their magic use in fights like this.

“Is that because this is a battle of attrition? It’s exhausting when you’re not used to it.”

Hugging my knees to my chest, I meditated to increase my mana regen. Other adventurers taking a break were helping to carry in food stores from a teleport circle set up on the surface.

Though I wasn’t that hungry, having been in the rear guard instead of running around, I pulled some of the cookies I’d baked with the orphans out of my Magic Bag to eat and heal my exhaustion. The simple sweetness of the cookies was a balm to my tired body. When I split my cookies with some other adventurers, they seemed to enjoy them too. It might’ve just been because they were happy to get something sweet, but it helped bring them back around.

It seemed that within the goods carried in for all the adventurers,

there were also some separate special deliveries.

“Chise! Can I have a minute?”

“What’s up, Lena?”

Stopping her casting, Lena had come back to switch places with me and take a break herself. In her hand was a little package with a letter.

“It looks like the orphans sent something for you and Teto.”

“What could it be...? Ah, a mana potion.”

The letter was made of the paper the children made in the orphanage; it read, “Go, Big Sis Chise!” Attached was a mana potion made by Dan and the potion-brewing group.

“How nice to get provisions from the orphans.”

“Hee hee, it is. Lena, do you want the cookies and mana potions I have on me?”

“What, seriously?!”

“I have my potion from the kids here, after all,” I said, handing her my cookies and high-quality mana potions and drinking the children’s low-quality mana potion instead.

“The potions you make go down way more easily, and they’ve got so much more *oomph* than I’m used to. May I share them with Raphilia after?”

“Of course. We’re all together in this. Use all you like.”

“Thank you. How’s the kids’ work?”

“Tasted awful, and it didn’t give me much mana back at all. They still need lots of practice...but I’m still happy.”

They would’ve made a good bit of coin by selling it to the adventurer’s guild during the stampede, even if it was low quality, but they’d gone out of their way to send it to me instead. Though I half-wished they’d be more selfish, it still warmed my heart.

Things ground on uninterrupted for a good while.

“What’s Teto up to...?”

After Teto helped make the encampment to protect the stairs to the surface, she’d struck off to fight the monsters outside the camp walls. She’d also been collecting the items that dropped from the monsters that the other mages and I killed before they disappeared.

“Lady Wiiiitch~! I collected lots!”

“Thank you, Teto. But you should rest too. We still have a long way to go.”

“I’ll rest after I do a little bit more!”

Teto was raring to go; the other adventurers who were used to the stampede gave her wry smiles. They must’ve thought she wasn’t pacing herself. But as more time passed, she didn’t slow down at all.

Though most of the monsters on the first day were D-rank and below, we started to get C-ranks mixed in by day two. At that point,

most AOE magic couldn't one-shot them anymore, so us adventurers left the camp and headed out to fight. The B-rank and above adventurers precisely targeted the monster's vitals, defeating them in a few shots. Teto and I were right there with them.

"Thunder Arrow!"

"Let's go!"

Most of the monsters' skin had become too thick to cut with blades of wind, so I'd switched to high-DPS lightning magic. Teto also started slashing things down faster.

"Wow, those girls are so young, but they're keeping up with the B-ranks!"

"They're the two who'd been bringing land dragon mats to the guild. They've both got court magician-level mana pools, don't they?"

"That's not all. I heard that they'd donated to the city's orphanage and even gave the kids jobs. Who the hell are they?"

I overheard the people who had fallen back for healing talking about me. I just ignored them and kept plugging away at culling monsters.

"You guys should rest. This dungeon'll go up to B-rank monsters at the end. If you're worn out by then, you'll be putting more of a load on the other adventurers."

"All right. We'll go rest."

It'd be bad if we were pooped at the very end, so we rested in the provided rest area. The first two days of fighting must've gotten to me, because I fell asleep in Teto's arms before I even realized it.

Chapter 28: The Sacred Sword of Dawn

When I woke up, day three of the stampede was upon us.

Though the first B-rank monsters had started appearing, the overall spawn rate had dipped. First, there were more of the land dragons we were used to, plus some monsters who were said to come from lower than the twenty-fifth floor, according to ancient documents.

Numerous C-rank parties were grouping up to take on single monsters, while B-rank parties went at them alone. Teto started killing the B-ranks all on her lonesome, while I helped the C-rank parties.

“Here I go. *Psychokinesis, Hard Shot!*”

I used my flight magic to soar up into the false sky, then took chunks of iron I’d shaved off the blade from my hydra battle out of my magic bag; a simple hardening spell made them ideal ammunition for my psychokinetic attacks. The shrapnel nailed its targets to the ground, leaving them helpless against the C-rank adventurers. I let them claim the kill so that they’d earn the experience.

“Okay now, this is the first time I’m seeing this monster.”

There was a group of dragon monsters that were a touch more powerful than land dragons, probably from past the twenty-fifth floor and on the higher end of the B-rank. They shrugged off my shrapnel trick, prying their limbs free from the ground and trucking on.

“*Gravity!*”

Unfortunately for them, I still had great ideas to spare; a gravity spell rooted my targets deep into the earth.

“It’d be a pain if they pulled them out again, so I’ll just take them out. *Thunderbolt!*”

I dropped lightning on them from above, blinding the area around us. Normally, they would’ve covered themselves with mana and weakened the blast, but the lightning flowed into them from the iron shards, destroying them from the inside. Once the light disappeared, all that was left was red-hot blades and the monsters’ drops.

“Chise, we’re nearing the end. Just a little bit more.”

Just as you’d expect from an A-rank party, Arsus and his gang were slaying monsters left and right. Once we put down the last group of B-rank dragon-types, there were no monsters left at all.

“Is it over?” Once a few days passed and new monsters stopped

coming up from lower floors, and the remaining monsters returned to their natural places on each floor, the stampede would truly have ended.

As I stared out vacantly at the empty post-stampede plains from the sky, I noticed a new monster coming up from the seventh floor.

“Arsus!”

“I know! This is an emergency. That’s stronger than the other monsters!”

It was said that the monsters who appeared during the stampede capped out at B-rank. But what just appeared must’ve been A-rank. Though it was smaller than the five-headed hydra I’d killed before, it might’ve had even stronger skills to make up for it.

“That’s bad. C-ranks, evacuate! B-ranks, use Body Strengthening and max out your defenses! One wrong move and this monster’ll clip your head from your body in an instant!”

Arsus stood right at the front, throwing orders, and the Swords of Daybreak and the B-ranks leaped into the fray with the monster, a bug-type with a thick carapace and bladed forelimbs—the Deathscythe Mantis.

“Girls, you run too! We’ll hold it back until the stampede ends! If we’re lucky, it’ll retreat back into the depths!”

“No, we’ll stay. The more man power you have, the better, right?”

While the higher-ranked adventurers who were used to stampedes still had some spunk after fighting for days, the C-ranks were absolutely exhausted. That was why Arsus had ordered them to evacuate, but Teto and I could still go on. And if he was saying “if we’re lucky” about it not getting up to the surface, it would get out into the city if the fight broke bad. Father Paulo and the orphans were up there. We *had* to end things inside the dungeon.

“Fine. Let’s go, then!”

Right after we decided what we were doing, the Deathscythe Mantis, with its head like an inverted pyramid and cold, massive eyes, spread its wings and flew at us, almost sliding across the ground.

“Teto, we’re stopping it!”

“Roger!”

“*Earth Prison!*”

I flew to the floor; the both of us controlled the ground to make a stone cage around the mantis, piling up layer upon layer upon layer. The spell we’d woven into the cage made it sturdier than it ever should have been, but the Deathscythe mantis cleaved its way out like a hot knife through butter.

“That only stopped it for a second. But—”

Lena and Raphilia had popped off long-range attacks, hitting it dead-on. While the waves of magic blocked my view, I kept my Mana

Perception going and felt that the mana surrounding the mantis had lessened.

“It’s coming!”

“Next is meee!”

The Deathscythe Mantis slashed at the waves, not stopping. While the concentrated attacks of the high-ranked adventurers had knocked off one of its wings, its desire to kill us was unabated. Its scythes clashed with Arsus’s sword.

“Amazing... So that’s how strong an A-rank adventurer is...”

I focused my mana to my eyes and watched their mana move. Arsus didn’t have as much total mana as Teto did, but he moved his mana everywhere to keep it from being consumed, and the mana he used for Body Strengthening was much denser than mine or Teto’s. Still, the difference between the mantis’s offense and Arsus’s defense was paper thin, and it looked like it was wearing on his nerves.

As the mantis kept attacking, Arsus was gradually pushed back. He was just barely defending against it, with no way to press the attack. As he tanked it, the other adventurers jumped at the chance to attack it from the sides, but its hard carapace didn’t let them get any good blows in, partially because the Deathscythe Mantis and Arsus were so close that they couldn’t use any attacks that were too strong.

“Go. *Laser!*”

“Haaaaah~!”

Out of everyone, only my focused light beam and Teto’s slashes broke through its armor, damaging it.

“If we keep this up—?!”

As Arsus’s blade kept meeting the mantis’ scythes, he quickly pulled back, feeling the mantis begin focusing mana into them. Then, as he blocked the attack at the very last second, his magic sword was sliced clean in half.

“Dammit!”

“Teto, take his place!”

“Got it!”

Teto jumped in to block the mantis’s attacks as Arsus stared blankly at the halves of his weapon.

“Arsus, are you okay?!”

“...It broke my sword.”

His party was worried, but the fatigue and destruction of his weapon had gotten to him. It spread to the rest of the B-ranks, but Arsus quickly came back to himself and shot off more orders.

“I have no way of attacking anymore! The only ones who can damage it now are the mages! We’ll pull back and hit it from a distance with magic! Adventurers, fall back a floor, then get ready for the mages to hit it all at once!”

While the rest of the adventurers gradually retreated, I stayed, since Teto was the only one holding the Deathscythe Mantis back.

“Okay. Chise, Teto, you pull back too. I’ll buy you a little time.”

“Wait, there’s no way you’re going to handle it with your spare sword if your magic sword is gone!” Lena protested against Arsus’s decision.

“Then are you telling me we should pull back and leave things to Teto? Should I, an A-rank adventurer, take these girls’ futures away?! I’ll buy time, even if it kills me!” Arsus cried, tragic but brave.

As they spoke, Teto and the mantis kept hitting each other, and when it attacked with mana-strengthened scythes again, Teto’s magic sword broke too.

“O-Ooh? Huh?”

It had learned from when Arsus was unable to take the blow, because it attacked again, slicing through Teto’s enormous Body Strengthening mana and cutting her in half. Since her Body Strengthening hadn’t been as dense as him, she hadn’t been able to block the mana attack.

“Ghh! Teto’s gone, all because I was too slow!”

“Hey, Arsus. Could you beat it if you had the right weapon?” I asked detachedly.

It would have been simple to use the same overwhelmingly MP-costly Creation Magic that had killed the water hydra to blow the mantis away in front of Arsus in his tragic bravery. But he was a man, and he had his pride. That made me want to let him have the kill.

“What are you saying, Chise?!”

“Answer me. Could you beat it if you had the right weapon?”

Arsus looked back at me suspiciously, but when he realized I hadn’t gone mad at seeing my partner Teto go down, he gave me a firm nod back.

“Yeah, I could. No, I *will*. I’ll get revenge for Teto!”

“Then I’ll make a special sword just for you. *Creation!*”

In the end, I used up all of the mana crystals I’d saved up again on one single cast. While the massive guillotine I’d made the last time took 100,000 MP, this spell took three times that.

The shining mana from the mana crystals I yanked out of my magic bag became a massive light, coming together and changing to something like the golden light of the dawn. As the Deathscythe Mantis backed away in fear of the sheer amount of mana it felt, one godly sword was created.

“The Sword of Dawn, I guess.”

The sword’s skills were Unbreakable, Physical Ability Strengthening, and Light Blade Generation. It was daybreak—a magic weapon deserving of the name “The Sword of Dawn.”

“Here. Now I’ve paid you back for helping us save the kids.”

“What the hell is this sword...? Ahh, I don’t get it! But—” As soon as he took hold of the Sword of Dawn, he realized that it was incomparably stronger than his old magic sword. “Yeah, I’ll do it, I’m gonna do it! Uooooooooaaaaaargh!”

He held the sword at the ready, had his priestly party member buff him with a *Bless* spell, then slashed at the mantis. While he’d been completely on the defensive before, the Sword of Dawn’s blessings let him get in the first move with his Body Strengthening, and by pouring mana through it, he created a blade of light that burned straight through its carapace and bisected the beast.

“This is the end!”

All too soon, he’d sliced both of the mantis’s scythes off and cut its body in two. And while it survived that, his blade of light pierced through its head.

And so, Dungeon City’s Stampede ended, and the A-rank party the Swords of Daybreak gained the sacred Sword of Dawn.

Chapter 29: The Stampede's End

“Chise. There’s so much I want to say right now, but thank you. And I’m sorry that I let Teto die.”

“Ah, you’re worried about *that*. Teto, get up already.”

“Roger!”

“Whoa?! Sh-She’s alive?!”

Teto, who’d been sliced cleanly in two, cheerfully answered my order from the ground and regenerated her body, bringing it back together again.

“She was cut down, but she’s not bleeding, and she’s alive! Wait, is she undead?!”

“No. Let’s rest and I’ll explain everything.”

Returning to the defensive base we’d made on the sixth floor, we kept watch for new monsters, and I explained.

“Hah... So Chise has a unique skill called Creation Magic, and Teto used to be a golem... I don’t believe it.”

“It’s fine if you don’t believe me, but keep quiet about it.”

“I *can’t* say anything about it!”

I told Arsus how the sword I’d given him was created, and that Teto was a new race created from a golem who’d absorbed a spirit with no sense of self. She wouldn’t die from just getting sliced in half, and she showed him how she could turn part of her body back into earth.

Though they didn’t quite believe it, they were wary of Teto, who could technically be called a demon. But seeing her hug me on her knees and go on about recharging her “Lady Witch Battery” made their ill will vanish.

“So. Creation Magic, huh? If people caught wind that you could make a magic weapon like that, or precious metals, you’d be everyone’s target.”

If my Creation Magic was used for evil, there really wasn’t a limit to what it could destroy. If I created too much money, I could run the value of currency into the ground. If I made too much food and put it all on the market, I could put a massive dent into the primary industries. If I made skill orbs or magic weapons and gave them to soldiers, I could build a powerful army in just days. That’s why I thought that using Creation Magic calls a person’s conscience into question. If word got out that it existed, nothing good would come of

it.

And this world was one where the more mana that someone had, the longer they would live. It could be said that the problem would only last until I died, but that could take centuries, if not even longer.

“Is it really okay to give me such an amazing sword, though?”

“I decided it was okay because you were trying to protect all the other adventurers. Plus it was thanks for helping to save the orphans when they were kidnapped.”

And so, we began to discuss the drops from the Deathscythe Mantis we’d defeated. Though Arsus had been the one to kill it in the end, it was also true that it was only possible because of the sword I created and Teto’s bought time. We discussed the materials it dropped, and in the end—

“Okay! Chise gets to keep the mats! The story’ll be that her and Teto fought alongside us to defeat the mantis! Because of that, they’ll be raised to B-rank!”

“But wouldn’t that be giving us too much?”

“You dumbass! The magic sword of mine that got broke was worth twenty large golds, and you gave me one that’s even stronger. No, it’s not a magic sword. It’s a *sacred* sword! Something national-treasure level! There’s no way A-rank monster drops come even close to that!”

With that, we thought up a story to tell the adventurers who’d pulled back to the fifth floor to ready a full-on attack against the Deathscythe Mantis when they came to check what had happened. Then we spent another three days going further in than the sixth floor, checking each level. I was excused from checking to see if the floors were back to normal, since we hadn’t spent as much time exploring as others, instead doing various miscellaneous jobs back at the base.

After three days of fighting and three days of checks, it was confirmed that the dungeon was back to normal, and we were able to come back to the surface on day seven.

“Dealing with a Dungeon Stampede sure is tough.”

“Well, it only happens once a year. This is my seventh time, so I’m used to it, but with other unmanaged dungeons around the world, there’s damage from them too,” Arsus said seriously, stroking the sacred sword strapped to his hip.

While it had been known that his magic sword broke, his new sacred sword had gotten a lot of attention from a lot of adventurers. The story we came up with was that it was a sacred sword that I’d found in the dungeon which chose its wielder, and after I gave it to Arsus to replace his sword, it had chosen him. Of course, we also said that it had a restriction on it that limited wielders to those with a noble heart, who fought for the sake of others.

When we returned to the guild, we learned that while adventurers were free to do what they wished with the items they collected during the stampede, all of those adventurers who had participated in the multiday stampede were promised rewards. Teto's and my work during the stampede was judged by many to have been on the same level as B-ranks, and since we'd stayed to fight the death scythe mantis until the very end, the both of us rose to B-rank.

"To celebrate safely getting through the stampede..."

"Cheers!"

There was a grand toast in the pub to celebrate the end of the stampede, free of any casualties. Teto and I had been brought to the party, and we were set up in a corner, eating.

"Aha ha ha! Lady Wiiiitch~, this drink is yummy and makes me all floaty~!"

"Teto, you're drinking alcohol? Come here and drink some water."

"Fweh heh heh heh, there are three Lady Witches! I'm so happy~!"

I could have made one of many possible remarks about the utter preposterousness of a golem I'd seen shrug off poison gas getting positively shit-faced on so little, but I held myself back, the two of us resting as I buffered her against the inevitable hangover.

"Heeey, grats on ending the stampede and getting to B-rank! It's amazing that you're there while you're both still so young."

"Thank you. I can't drink, but cheers."

A very cheerfully drunk Arsus came over to talk to us, and I clinked my glass of juice against his mug.



“What’re you two gonna do now? Keep on tryin’ to clear the dungeon?”

I answered frankly.

“Hmm. I’ve found where I was born, so I’m going to go there with Teto.”

“The place where you were born?”

Teto had passed out with her head lying in my lap, and I gently combed my fingers through her hair.

“Turns out we passed right through the place I was looking for. I want to head there.”

The Wasteland of Nothingness, where Teto and I could live easily, was the place where I’d reincarnated right at the start.

“What are you gonna do when you go back there?”

“Well, it’s not anyone’s land, so I want to cultivate it and establish it as my own.”

“You’re settling down when you’re still so young?”

“It’s a relief to have somewhere that you can always return to.”

Arsus tilted his head, wondering. “Whatever. You two’re amazing with magic, so it’ll be a great place to live in no time!”

He knew about my Creation Magic, so I just smirked back. I decided to take Teto and head back to our apartment, before it got too late and the drunken adventurers started passing out.

“Okay, we’re leaving.”

“Mrmphm... Does clay count as a snack?”

As I giggled about her sleep-talking, I used my *Psychokinesis* to lighten Teto’s load, floating her to our apartment, where I set her down on the bed.

“It’s so dusty since we’d been in the dungeon for so long.”

I borrowed the apartment bath, and after bathing solo, I quietly slid into bed beside Teto, ending the chaotic week.

This is a digression, but when we visited the guild the next day—

“W-Water... I’m dying...”

“Ah... That’s rough.”

—I found last night’s compatriots paying for their revels, reduced to walking corpses begging for relief from their collective hangover.

“I am never drinking again...”

It was a noble enough commitment for Arsus to make, but something told me he wasn’t going to stick to it.

Chapter 30: Goodbye, Dungeon City

A few days after the end of the stampede, we visited the guild to get our updated guild cards.

“Chise, Teto. Congratulations on advancing to B-rank. Here are your new cards.”

“Thank you.”

“Thanks!”

Seven days of rewards and the profit we turned from selling back materials got us ten large gold each, making it our biggest haul ever. It would have been even more if we’d sold the magic stones too, but we kept them.

“Please put our rewards on our cards. Teto and I have finished what we came to this city to do, so we’ll be leaving soon.”

“I see... Winter is almost over, after all. We’ll be sad to see our dungeon breadwinners go. But you two can flourish anywhere. Do your best!”

We headed to the church next.

“Father. We’ve risen to B-rank, so we’ll be leaving the city within the next few days.”

“I see. We’ll miss you.”

We’d told him before that we’d eventually leave, as we were passing adventurers, so Father Paulo seemed both understanding and sad to see us say goodbye. But when we told the children, they tried to hold us back. It would have been easy to shake them off physically, but instead we gave in and stayed the night at the orphanage, spending time with the kids.

But that day, Danny-boy, who we’d been closest to, seemed off.

And so, a few days later, we ended the contract we had on the apartment we’d rented for the winter, and after using the money from that to buy various books from a bookstore, we went to leave the city.

But Dan was waiting for us at the city’s entrance.

“...Are you really leaving, Big Sis Chise?”

“You came to see us off, Danny-boy?”

The boy nodded his head as he looked down. “I’m really grateful to you, Big Sis! Everyone is! You gave us jobs, taught us how to earn money, and even came straight to save us when we were kidnapped!”

“I’ve gotten enough thanks now,” I said, only for Dan to look up, blushing to his ears.

“I’m grateful. I’m grateful, but I admire you just as much, and I love you! You taught me tons, and it was fun being with you! So stay in this city, in the orphanage!”

“Thank you. That was a wonderful confession.”

“Then—?”

When he looked up to me with his red face and teary eyes, it really fired up my desire to protect him, but—

“Unfortunately, Danny-boy, I have no intention of responding to your feelings. I have a goal, after all.”

“That’s...”

“It was fun being with all the orphans. And I love you like a little brother. But I’m a baaad witch, so you’d better not fall in love with a woman as awful as me next time,” I said, poking him in the forehead.



Not wanting me to see him cry, Dan roughly wiped at his eyes. “Big Sis Chise, you dummy! I’m gonna become a great man! A great mixologist! I’ll earn tons of money! And then I’ll make you regret turning me down!”

“Yes, do become an adult good enough to make me regret this,” I said, watching Danny-boy turn tail and run back towards the orphanage.

“You’re such a sinful woman, Lady Witch. Making an innocent little boy’s first love end so bitterly.”

“Teto? Where on earth did you learn those words?”

“The orphanage kids and the ladies at the guild.”

I signaled for Teto to crouch down, then lightly squished her cheeks.

“Are you satisfied, Lady Witch?”

“Thanks. I’ve calmed down now. Wasteland of Nothingness, here we come!”

“Got it! I’ll go anywhere with you!”

Alongside Teto, I backtracked through our trail to Dungeon City, bound for the Wasteland of Nothingness.

Extra Story: Dungeon City, Seventeen Years Later

Seventeen years passed.

Teto and I had returned, and I lifted my witch hat a little to look at the outer walls.

“This brings me back. The vibes haven’t changed much.”

As we lined up at the gate, we spotted a squad of children picking medicinal herbs on the nearby plains. One man guided them as the children searched.

“I wonder if those kids are from the orphanage? It looks like things are getting passed down just fine.”

“I’m glad!”

Our turn came while we watched them, and we were able to enter Dungeon City proper.

“It feels like it’s changed in ways that haven’t changed it.”

We walked along the road towards the adventurer’s guild, and there were adventurer-targeted food stalls lining it like there always had been. Though the types of food being sold hadn’t changed much, the vendors had either aged or passed the stalls on to the next generation. They used plant paper made in the city as either wrapping paper or paper bags, handing them to customers.

“Snacks for the kids, break time in the dungeon, for your journeys, get church-stamped cookies!”

“Can I have ten?”

“Yes! Thank you very much!”

The two of us bought a paper bag full of cookies from a stall run by the church’s orphans to support themselves, and then we ate them as we looked around the city.

“This block has really changed, huh?”

As I looked up, I saw tons of smoke rising into the air from the workshops in the artisan’s district. Or rather, it must’ve been steam, since I couldn’t smell any soot or smoke.

Dungeon City had advanced to making their paper from wood found in the forest areas of the dungeon. But the magical potions needed to dissolve the wood used water, and it was also required to spread the remaining wood fibers out. There weren’t enough good water sources near the city to fill the rapidly growing necessity, and they couldn’t do any flood-controlling work to bring water in. And so,

the lord of Dungeon City had created a magic tool that could create water, and gave it to the artisans.

But then, the need for wood materials for paper, which had become an important export, overtook the need for firewood. Because of this, the paper factories introduced magical heating tools to save on firewood, and in the decade since, those tools had spread, raising the city's convenience.

"But to think that they'd use the water hydra's magic stone I gave them..."

"You never know what life will bring."

The magic stone from the water hydra that I'd offered to the adventurer's guild to get them to approve my orphanage-saving plan had ended up in the lord's hands, and was used for the water-creating magic tool. It seemed that said tool was made to work on a semipermanent basis. If you put magic stones in, you'd get water out, so the magic stones from dungeon trash mobs gained value.

"The water-creating magic tool is moderately efficient, so the mana it doesn't convert is spread through the air. That works out great for the gods," I muttered, focusing mana into my eyes and looking around, only to see the mana around the city slowly diffusing.

The mana that wasn't converted dissolved into the water and air, flowing about. The mana-filled water was then used in potions or paper to make it better quality. Then the water was spread throughout the land, gradually increasing the harvests of the fields on the outskirts of the city.

"Too much mana would make a clot, but it doesn't look like that's happening now."

The mana in the surrounding areas was thin, so the mana diffused in that direction, meaning that we didn't have to worry about any monsters.

When we visited the adventurer's guild, we heard a voice coming from the training grounds.

"You lot, you really think you're gonna hold back the stampede like that?!"

"N-No!"

The young adventurers who earned most of their money in the dungeons were all working together to fight a single man. Said man looked young enough to be in his early thirties, but was actually over forty. Though he was weaker thanks to passing his prime, he'd spent years adventuring and was thus skilled in using his mana for Body Strengthening, defeating all of the younger adventurers.

"Okay, take a break! Next!"

The sight of him training the next group of adventurers reminded me of when Teto used to spend her time in the same training grounds.

The male adventurer had half-retired, citing his age, but he still worked at the guild raising the next generation. He was the Dungeon City's hero, who had conquered the ancient capital of Apanemis's dungeon and seen its core. Though he'd left the dungeon, since it was the key to Apanemis's economy and industries, he captured another twenty-level dungeon that developed nearby, completed A-rank hunting quests, and racked up tons of great achievements as the leader of the adventuring party The Swords of Daybreak.

"Mister Arsus, sir, please let us swing your sacred sword too!"

"Wait, dumbass! Stop it, you're being rude! And you can't handle it anyway!"

"My sword? Fine, swing it if you can."

When one of the adventurers undergoing his training asked that question, his buddies tried to stop him, but Arsus just took his sacred sword off of his hip, scabbard included, and handed it over to the younger man.

"Heh heh! Now *I'm* a wielder of a sacred sword... Wait, huh?"

"I *told* you, idiot!"

The young adventurer tried to pull the Sword of Dawn out of the scabbard, but he couldn't, going bright red as he used every ounce of his strength to get it out. A few other adventurers made attempts as well, but none of them could pull it out.

"Aha ha ha, sucks to be you. It decided you're not worthy of being its wielder," Arsus laughed.

I gave him an exasperated look as we approached them.

"You're going to make your sacred sword mad if you play with it like that."

"Also, Teto wants to fight you too!"

"Oooh?! Chise, Teto!" Arsus cried out in surprise, taking his Sword of Dawn back from the younger adventurers so he could greet us closer up. "Heard from Raphilia a few years back that you met her in the royal capital, but what've you been up to nowadays?"

"We're spending most of our time working in Gald, the country of beastmen. We came back for some personal business, so we decided to pop in on the way."

As we gave each other light updates on what we were each doing, another acquaintance appeared in the training grounds.

"Arsus, I've brought your lunch."

"Papa!"

Appearing from the opposite side of the training grounds was Lena, the Swords of Daybreak's mage. She wasn't wearing the witch-like black mermaid dress and cape she'd worn in the past, instead going with a more matronly sweater and skirt. Beside her were a little boy and a little girl who looked like both of the former adventurers,

and the kids flew right at Arsus.

“Lena! Some rare acquaintances have come to visit today!”

“Rare acquaintances? ...Chise and Teto?!”

Lena cried out in shock. The couple’s children looked at us, clearly befuddled.

“It’s really been so long. Ahh, you haven’t changed a bit!” Lena said, giving each of us a hug as a greeting.

I wasn’t quite sure how to word it, but she looked a lot more motherly now that she was married and raising kids. I was a little bit jealous, since my growth had stopped, and I’d never be able to have what she had.

“So how long are you two staying?”

“We just dropped by while doing some personal business, since it’s so nostalgic.”

“After this, we’re headed to meet with Father Paulo!”

Though the both of them seemed a bit reluctant to part when we’d barely spoken, this was how most meetings between adventurers went.

“I’m glad I got to see you guys today. If you ever need anything else, come back!”

“I’d like it if you told our children about your adventures next time.”

“If that time ever comes, sure. Teto, let’s go.”

“Roger! See you again someday!”

Making promises to meet again that most likely would never come to fruition, Teto and I waved, heading to our next stop.

Our next destination was the church and its orphanage. The church had gone through many repairs, but the orphanage had been wholly rebuilt once, and the potion-making facility next door was now a technical training institution for the orphans.

Peeking into the church, the orphanage kids were learning how to read and write alongside the other local children. The person who was teaching them was none other than Arsus’s priestly former party member. It seemed he’d given up adventuring and returned to the cloth, taking over for Father Paulo.

Father Paulo himself was quite advanced in age at this point, enjoying a comfortable retirement sipping tea in the orphanage’s garden, but I heard through the grapevine that he also sometimes had locals asking him for advice. While he’d had a tough time in his youth, now his heart was at peace.

Now, we approached him as he sat alone in the gardens close to the building.

“Oh my. Lady Chise, Lady Teto, it’s been so long. Please, do have a seat.”

“It really has been long, Father.”

“Really long!”

Since Father Paulo’s mana pool was so large, his actual aging was slow, so it mostly just looked like he was a little thinner. He urged us to sit down with him with a gentle smile, and we obliged.

“Would you like some tea?”

“Yes, I would. We bought some church-stamped cookies on our way here.”

“Let’s eat the cookies that the children made together!”

And so, Teto and I chatted with Father Paulo about various things. Normally, he would be the one nodding along to the locals who came to him for advice, but this time, it was our turn.

And lastly—

“Lady Chise, Lady Teto. I served the church for a long time, for my faith and for the children. Entering my final years, I’ve begun to wonder if it was the right thing to do.”

“It might not have been the very best,” I said. “But you did what you could and were able to leave things to the next generation. Even if you can’t do it alone, if you can at least pass things to your posterity in better shape than it came to you, I believe you will eventually reach what you were working towards.”

“...Yes.”

“The Goddess Liriel has watched over your deeds. I don’t believe there’s a single thing to be embarrassed about in your life.”

Hearing my words, Father Paulo choked back sobs, curling into himself as he cried. Then, with Teto and I gently kept rubbing his back, he calmed down shortly.

“My doubts have been cleared. Now I can freely journey to be with the goddesses.”

“Hee hee, it’s a bit early for that. You’re still the one supporting everyone’s spirits, Father Paulo.”

“You need to keep living healthily!”

We spoke to the father as the pressure he felt in his heart was lifted and he cheered up, only for a fuss to bleed in from the church. It seemed that the children’s reading and writing lessons were finished, and they were filing out of the room.

“Well then, Father. Here’s a donation towards your church’s orphanage.”

“Use this to eat something yummy with everyone and stay healthy!”

I pulled four small gold out of my magic bag and handed them to Father Paulo. It was the same amount we had donated on our first meeting with him. He remembered, smiling wryly at my cheeky offering.

Teto and I greeted the children as we passed, exiting the church. In the decade and change between now and our last time there, the children we'd known had all grown into adults, making me both lonely and happy at the same time.

"Last up is Danny-boy."

"Lady Witch, he isn't young enough to be a boy anymore."

"Heh heh, you're right. He must be twenty-seven or twenty-eight now."

Father Paulo had told us where he was. He'd opened a potions shop near the orphanage and was living independently as its owner. I was excited to see how he'd grown.

As we walked into the store, there was someone ahead of us talking business with the female shopkeeper.

"I've brought your order of Roniseras vine once again."

"Thank you for always delivering it. This will let us prepare for Anode Fever season."

"Oh no. I'm just grateful that they've become a major financial resource in our village."

"But these potion ingredients should be needed in tons of places elsewhere. Is it really all right to sell so much to us wholesale?"

"Yes. Thanks to our village mixologist, our Roniseras vine cuttings have grown well, and we've been able to increase our stocks. We've been able to sell a little bit more wholesale because of it."

Keeping an ear to their conversation, I looked at all the sample potions lined up on the shop shelves and saw that they were being sold at proper fixed quality and prices.

"Lady Witch, Lady Witch. The shopkeeper looks a little bit like you."

"Like me...? Hmm..."

I looked at the shopkeeper; Teto wasn't really wrong. She was, of course, visually older and taller, but her long dark brown hair kind of looked like my black hair when the light hit it just so, and her gentle eyes and the shape of her eyebrows did resemble mine a little. She looked like what Danny-boy had probably imagined I would look like when I was older.

While I was mulling over that, the merchant had finished delivering his herb order and said his goodbyes, and the female shopkeeper noticed my fixed gaze and gave us a smile.

"What can I get for the two of you today?"

"...Three bottles each of hi-potions and mana potions. The strongest stuff you've got."

"They're quite expensive. Is that all right?"

"Yes, please."

"Understood."

The recipes were written in the mixology manuals I'd given to the children long ago, so they were perfect for seeing exactly how much they'd improved since then. As I checked over the potions she'd rushed out for us, I saw that they were all of the highest quality, so I had nothing to complain about.

Making potions of this level would take a normal mixologist three days of imbuing mana to make. It meant that Danny-boy had gained both the skill and endurance to do the job. "Were these potions made by the owner of the shop?"

"Yes, my husband made them all. Are there any problems?" asked the shopkeeper—or rather, Dan's wife.

I shook my head. "No, they're all wonderful. I'd like to meet him, if that's all right," I answered, prompting her to head out to the workshop out in the back of the store.

Since asking to see the faces of artisans who made products like this was common, Danny-boy came right out. He'd grown into a bit of a beanpole in the ten-odd years since we'd parted, and had become a virile young man, but there were still traces of his past looks.

As I took my witch's hat off in front of him, he realized who I was, and his eyes went wide.

"Wh...a...? Big Sis Chise...? And Big Sis Teto...?"

"It's been a while, Danny-boy. You've become quite the wonderful man."

"You're bigger than Teto now!"

Dan was shocked to see that we'd barely changed since he'd last seen us seventeen years earlier. Next to him, his wife mumbled something about us being the benefactors of the orphanage, probably having heard everything about us from him.

Quickly coming back to his senses, he gave us the same cheeky look he'd had in the past.

"How'd I grow up, Big Sis Chise? Aren't I a good enough adult to make you regret things?" he said, puffing his chest out full of confidence.

"Yes, you're a wonderful adult now. But there's something still missing."

"Missing?"

"Yes. You've chosen a wonderful woman much better than me to be beside you, after all. But it will never be enough, not unless you stay with her your entire life and make each other happy."

"Lady Witch is very strict. You two will need to work hard together!"

As Teto and I both put him on blast, Danny-boy and his wife looked at each other, an innocent blush coloring their faces.

He might've originally chosen her thanks to his aggravated first

love for me. But I wanted him to look at the woman he'd chosen as his wife again and properly appreciate what he had. I wished for them to be so happy that I'd be jealous of their normal life.

"Well then, I hope you live happily."

"Do your best!"

Just as we had with Father Paulo and the others, we chose to leave rather than speak to them for any great length of time. By seeing Danny-boy and the potions he made, I could imagine just how hard he worked. I figured that the wife beside him now was more precious to him than the person he admired in his memories.

And so, hoping that their hard work would make them happy, Teto and I left Dungeon City, teleporting away once we hit the outskirts, pointed towards our actual destination—the Royal Capital.



Making Magic

Aloha Zachou
illust. Tetubuta

The Sweet Life of a Witch Who Knows an Infinite MP Loophole Volume 2





**“So Sis can
smile like that...”**

**“She must like
cute things.”**

**“Or maybe she
likes soft things?”**

**“I thought Chise
was a pretty girl,
but she’s super cute
when she smiles.”**

**Since it was our first try,
it wasn’t all that well
balanced out, but it was
soft and squishy, and
somehow a little bit cute.**

**I squished the bear,
moving its arms and
legs around a little.**



Bonus Short Stories

Teto and My's Journey of Detours

After leaving the pioneer village for Dungeon City, Teto and I made stops at a lot of villages, whether for quests or because we heard interesting things about them. At one village, we'd taken on a routine quest to deliver mail.

"Hello! We've got mail, courtesy of the guild!"

"Ooh! I see, I see! Come on in!"

When we arrived at the village mayor's house, the elderly mayor himself appeared. He invited us inside, where I pulled a stack of letters out of my magic bag. The clients for the quest were some adventurers who'd left the village and some other people who'd gone to the town nearby for jobs. It seemed they pooled their money together to regularly send letters back to their homes.

The mayor must have found a letter for his family in the stack, because he opened one, his expression softening.

"Thank you for delivering these. I'll give you my signature to complete the quest right away," he said, taking the quest paperwork and signing his name.

"Did the letter say something good?"

"You looked really happy!"

He looked a little embarrassed at Teto and I's questioning as he signed. "Yep. My third son wrote that he'd be coming back to the village soon..." the mayor told us, then his expression clouded over. "You girls are adventurers, aren't you?"

"Yes. We're on our way to Dungeon City."

"Lady Witch and I are taking lots of detours and stopping at all kinds of different villages!"

Though Teto could have stood to say a little less, the mayor seemed amused.

"I see, I see. You've been to many villages then. What do you think of ours?"

From the glimpse we'd gotten on the way to the mayor's house, it looked like a normal place.

"It seems nice. Quiet and peaceful."

"It's great! We've helped settle a village before, so we know how hard it is to do!"

"Thank you, girls," he said happily. "But you know, this village

has barely changed since I was a boy. Most of the younger ones find it boring and leave—not the least of them my son.”

If what the mayor was saying was true, the village hadn’t changed in over half a century.

“Quite honestly, I felt the same way as a boy. I wanted to leave. That’s exactly why I don’t try to stop the kids wanting to do the same,” the mayor continued, lowering his voice in jest, which made Teto and I smile. “There’s nothing here in our village. I’m expecting that my third son’ll pack up and leave again soon enough.”

He was probably only able to be honest like that because we were outsiders. But I said—

“But there aren’t any other villages where he has family waiting.”

“She’s right! All of the villagers here seem kind!”

The mayor smiled at our replies. “Waiting family and kind villagers. Those are exactly what our village is proud of. Thank you, girls. That was nice of you to say, even if you were just being polite.”

“Grr. Lady Witch and Teto were telling the truth!”

“Come now, Teto. We should get going soon.”

I comforted Teto as she pouted, and the two of us left the mayor’s house. We took another look around the village on our way out, but our impression didn’t change a bit. Our visit there was barely a tiny drop in the bucket of time, but the village gave off the nostalgic vibes of a place that’d always be there to welcome family back.

Turning our back on the village in all its mundane and tender glory, the two of us headed back to town to turn in our mail delivery quest.

Dungeon City’s Antique Shop

Not long after we started living in Dungeon City, Teto and I found an old-looking shop off of the main road.

“I wonder what kind of store this is?”

“Lady Witch! Let’s go in!”

Teto pulled me inside by the arm, and the elderly shopkeeper there gave us a curious look.

“Oh my, customers! How rare. Welcome.”

“Hello! What sort of shop is this?” Teto asked cheerily, her voice not matching the dim shop interior at all.

“This is an antique shop run by the guild,” answered the elderly man politely.

Apparently, it had started as a shop to sell dungeon plunder with no obvious use and now it also dealt with things sourced through other venues.

“We haven’t got anything expensive or useful, but feel free to

browse.”

“Hmm, I see. I might just buy something.”

As I started perusing the wares, Teto had already zeroed in on her own private treasure.

“Lady Wiiiitch~! Teto found something she wants!”

“You want...a vase?” While I could feel a little bit of mana coming off of it, I still gave her a weird look for the ugly vase in her arms.

“Why did you pick that?”

“Because it’s amazing!”

“...A-Amazing?” I parroted as she lifted the vase up, revealing cracks and holes in the bottom. It sure didn’t look that amazing. “But if you want it, then I guess...”

When I bought the ugly vase for her for three silver, Teto happily shoved it under one arm as she grabbed my hand in her other. “Okay, Lady Witch! Let’s go use it right away!”

“Teto?! Use it? How the hell are we going to use it?!”

As I cried out in confusion, Teto dragged me back to our apartment.

“Hah, hah... Teto. What are you planning on doing with that vase?” I asked again as we stopped behind the building.

She just backed up a little bit, still holding it tight. “Lady Witch. We do...this!”

Lifting the vase high with both hands, she threw it at the ground with all her strength. Seeing it shatter with a shrill crash, I cried out in shock.

“Wha— Wait, you smashed it?!”

Seeing her satisfied look made me wonder if she’d bought it just for stress relief. But immediately after, I noticed that the mana radiating from the broken shards was intensifying.

“It’s coming, Lady Witch!”

The second that she said that, the rising mana floated up into the sky in a raging burst of wind. I nearly got knocked back, but Teto kept me upright. Then I was able to see what was happening with my own eyes.

“Thank you for saving me.”

“A wind spirit?! There was a spirit trapped inside that vase?!”

“Teto somehow felt something close to herself. It really seemed to want out.”

Though she used to be a golem, merging with a spirit who’d lost its sense of self and evolving had made her empathize with them.

It seemed like the pot she’d found this time was an ancient magical tool for sealing spirits away. Since it was said that places with spirits were brimming with nature, magic to capture them had existed since days long past. But on the flip side, since taking a spirit away

meant that the land would suffer, magic like that was classified as forbidden.

“Lady Witch, can I save more if I find them?”

“Sure.”

Teto and I held hands, still transfixed by the empty place in the air where the wind spirit had flown under the cold sky.

A few days later...

“Chise, Teto! My Spirit Magic has been stronger lately! I won’t lose this time!”

“I see. That’s wonderful.”

“That’s great~.”

Teto and I just gave Raphilia lukewarm looks as we nodded along.

Going Out on a Cold Winter’s Day

Teto and I were living in a rented apartment room in Dungeon City.

“Today’s our day off~! You should relax too, Lady Witch~!”

“Yeah. I will once I get a few more of these done.”

As Teto gave me an innocent grin from her place on the bed, I smiled and kept casting my Creation Magic. While it *was* our day off, it would be a waste to do nothing with my mana, so I was steadily filling my stock of Mana Crystals.

But feeling Teto’s amused smile behind me, I realized that she couldn’t spend the day as she pleased if I spent it all cooped up in our room. Stopping my work, I turned and asked her, “Hey, Teto. We’re off today, so is there anything you wanted to do?”

“Howah? Anything I want to do?”

“Yeah. I want to do something you want to do—whatever you want.”

It was cold outside, but we didn’t take a day off often. It would be unhealthy to spend it all hunkered down.

“Hmm... I want to go out with you, Lady Witch?”

“Go out?”

“Yeah! And I want to spend the day lounging around in our room, go do some practice fights in the guild training grounds, and eat lots of yummy things!”

“Um, we can’t do all of those at once, so let’s get through them one by one.”

I decided we’d go through the list gradually on our days off.

“Okay then. Let’s go out and eat something delicious today.”

“Okaaaay!”

As the two of us left our apartment, the cold air made me shiver under my robe.

“Urgh, it’s gotten really cold. I can’t wait for spring.”

“Your breath is white, Lady Witch!”

On the streets with the remnants of the fallen snow piled off to the curb, I curled in on myself. I tried to avoid even a little bit of air getting into my anti-cold and anti-heat enchanted robe through any openings.

“Lady Witch, why don’t you use your magic to keep yourself warm, like you usually do?”

“I was using my mana to make Mana Crystals up until a moment ago, so I don’t have much to spare. Urgh, I haven’t felt cold in a while.”

Just as I was thinking to myself that it was a mistake not keeping a bit of mana on hand for quality-of-life casting outside, Teto held out her hand towards me.

“Lady Witch, Lady Witch, Teto’s hand is warm! If we hold hands, you won’t be cold!”

“I’m fine. It’s cold, but not so cold that I can’t deal with it, and I can just wait for my mana to regenerate a bit.”

Plus, holding hands with Teto on a walk made me feel a little like a kid. I might’ve still only looked twelve due to my Slowed Aging skill, but I was much older mentally.

But when I refused—

“But Lady Witch, you said you’d do what Teto wanted...” she said, tears gathering in her eyes.

So she’s pulling that card, I thought to myself, looking up into the thickly clouded sky and sighing. “Okay, fine. Let’s hold hands.”

“Okay. Now your hand will be nice and warm!”

When I held out a hand to her, Teto’s expression immediately brightened. She wrapped my hand in hers, trying to warm mine to my fingertips.

“Lady Witch, let’s go eat something yummy that’ll warm us up!”

“Wait, Teto! You don’t have to rush! The shops aren’t going anywhere!”

And so, with Teto pulling me along, her hand wrapped around mine, we went on an eating tour of Dungeon City. The warmth of her grip made me forget to cast any anti-cold magic at all, and we spent our day off restaurant-hopping and stopping at any shops that caught our eye.



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Making Magic: The Sweet Life of a Witch Who Knows an Infinite
MP Loophole Volume 2
by Aloha Zachou

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Edited by Will Holcomb

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